REFRAME YOUR BRAIN

The User Interface for Happiness and Success

SCOTT ADAMS

Author of the Bestselling Classic *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big*

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For the Simultaneous Sippers
(Thank you for saving me.)

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1
How to Reprogram Your Brain

CHAPTER 2
Success Reframes

CHAPTER 3
Mental Health Reframes

CHAPTER 4
Social Life Reframes

CHAPTER 5
Physical Health Reframes

CHAPTER 6
Reality Reframes

CHAPTER 7
The Operating System for Your Mind

CHAPTER 8
How to Make Your Own Reframes

CHAPTER 9
Just the Reframes

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

More Content

Subscribers on scottadams.locals.com get the new *Dilbert Reborn* daily comic strip (a spicier and unfiltered version of classic *Dilbert*), a new comic called *Robots Read News* (an irreverent analysis of the headlines), more than 200 (and counting) micro lessons on life improvement and talent stacking, frequent livestream videos available nowhere else, my novels *God's Debris* and *The Religion War*, and other special content.

On some days, subscribers help write comics and watch the drawing process in real time. There is a lot of political content too, so don't be surprised by that. The Locals community has evolved into a digital friend group, and that's the vibe.

For just the *Dilbert Reborn* comic without the other nonsense, follow and subscribe on X (formerly known as Twitter), @ScottAdamsSays.

Introduction

THE DOG WALKING REFRAME

For years I found it annoying to walk my dog. All she ever wanted to do was sniff the grass and trees upon which other dogs had left their scent. Neither of us got much exercise. It was like tug-of-war to get Snickers to move at all.

One day, I saw an Instagram video in which a self-designated dog expert explained that dogs might need the sniffing more than the walking. Their brains light up when they sniff, and it can tire them out when they engage in vigorous sniffing. I had noticed how happy Snickers looked when sniffing, but my brain couldn't connect the dots because sniffing dog urine sounds inherently unpleasant to my human brain. But to the dog, it was the equivalent of checking her social media. I started naming the trees and shrubs in the park accordingly: Muta (formerly known as Facebark), Twigger, LeafedIn, Instabush, and Treemail. Obviously, the garbage receptacle into which people flung their dog poop bags was TikTok.

Once I understood the importance of sniffing, I reframed my experience this way.

Usual Frame: Taking the dog for a walk and failing.

Reframe: Taking the dog for a sniff and succeeding.

That reframe completely changed my subjective experience. Instead of failing at walking, I was succeeding at being a sniff-assistant. Snickers loved the new arrangement, and sure enough, twenty minutes of outdoor sniffing set her attitude right for the rest of the day.

But then I had a new problem. Standing around holding a leash is boring compared to walking. It's boring compared to most things. But then I reframed my boredom this way.

Usual Frame: I have nothing to do. I am just standing here.

Reframe: Perfect time to practice proper breathing and posture.

Now I spend twenty minutes a day enjoying the outdoors while breathing properly and practicing my posture. It feels good, which is enough to lock in the new habit. Now I am delighted to take my dog to the park. The only thing that changed was how I thought about the point of it all.

If you're like most people, you spend a lot of time standing in line or waiting for one thing or another. It feels like a gigantic waste of time. Maybe you check your phone, but that probably isn't as useful as it is anxiety-making. As you can tell from the Snickers story, I found a way to turn ***all*** mindless waiting time into one of the most productive parts of my day using the good-time-to-breathe reframe.

Usual Frame: I am waiting in line, which is a waste of time.

Reframe: I have time to breathe properly.

For decades I had heard about the benefits of proper breathing such as lowering anxiety and boosting positive energy. My problem was finding a consistent time of day to practice. My personality isn't compatible with anything that involves sitting and doing what *feels* like nothing, even if it's important. But breathing, you can do anywhere. You can be standing, sitting, driving, or walking.

I recommend trying the breathing method described by Dr. Andrew Huberman. This involves two sharp inhales through your nose, one after

another, followed by a long exhale through your mouth. Apparently, there is science behind the method, but in my experience, you can feel the difference so quickly and profoundly that you won't need any convincing that it works. You'll know in under a minute the first time you try it. I was surprised how different I felt after a few repetitions. I was relaxed in both mind and body.

By pairing the intolerable boredom of waiting in line with the habit of breathing properly, you can solve two problems at once. Your wait will become more tolerable, and your health and attitude will get a boost that will quickly addict you to replacing boredom with breathing. Lately I find myself looking for opportunities to do the breathing exercises because I like the immediate upgrade in calm energy. Now any boredom I experience from waiting—for anything—reminds me that it's a perfect time to work on my mental and physical health. No one around me notices.

An Odd Story

In the spring of 2022, I cured the common sneeze with some help from friends. I'm not talking about the kind of sneeze that catches you off guard. I mean the kind you feel building up. I discovered that if I did a pretend sneeze, it somehow deactivated the real one. The first time I tried it, I thought it was a fluke. After the second time I used it successfully, I alerted my followers on social media and asked them to try the method. It worked! At least for many of them.

One person—I wish I remembered who—discovered you didn't need to act out the sneeze with a fake "achoo," as I had been doing. You can simply *imagine* sneezing. I tried that next. That worked, too! And it was a better method for public places.

And so it came to pass that the creator of the *Dilbert* comic strip and his friends cured the common sneeze. Or at least one type of sneeze.

I tell you the sneeze story to demonstrate how much power our thoughts have over our bodies. And more importantly, how quickly those thoughts can work their magic. It can happen in seconds. I will teach you how to reframe your ordinary experiences in ways that get you more of what you want—in every domain—and less of what you don't want. Often it happens quickly—as with the sneeze cure—but other times you might have to reinforce the message with repetition.

If you have a chance to try suppressing a sneeze using the method described—and you discover it works for you—the experience will give you goosebumps. It will feel as if you just discovered you have some sort of superpower.

You won't be wrong.

If the sneeze cure doesn't impress you, that's okay because it was only the teaser. In the late summer of 2022, I saw a message on X claiming a video I had created in 2020 to reduce anxiety—using only reframing and hypnosis—had cured someone's daughter of debilitating anxiety. The father explained that prior to viewing my video, his daughter had tremendous trouble leaving the house because her anxiety was so oppressive. But her father reported that she not only managed to get out of the house, she had

also recovered so well she was about to be married. The father credited my video for her turnaround.

During my daily livestream show—called Coffee with Scott Adams, at 10:00 AM Eastern daily—I asked my followers on YouTube and on the Locals subscription service if any of them had a similar experience of reduced anxiety after viewing that video. A wall of "Yes" responses streamed down the live comments, with a smattering more on YouTube. (Locals subscribers were more likely to have watched the video.)

I was stunned.

If the commenters were right, I had "cured" dozens—maybe hundreds—of people of a lifetime of anxiety. And I did it using nothing but a series of reframes strung together to cancel the anxiety program running in people's minds.

I'm a trained hypnotist with decades of experience in persuasion and brain-hacking, so I had a strong hunch I could flip off the anxiety switch in some people. Probably not most people because people are too different. But I thought it was worth an hour of my time to test it by creating an anxiety reduction video in 2020.

It was time well spent.

I'll include in this book in text form the reframes I used in the anxiety cure video so you can try them out yourself. Don't skip ahead to them. You'll find out why.

If you're not excited about this book yet, here's my favorite reframe success story. If my feedback from social media followers is to be believed, this reframe has helped hundreds—perhaps thousands—of people stop drinking alcohol. I invented this reframe in 2013 for my book *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big*. Here's the simple reframe.

Usual Frame: Alcohol is a beverage.

Reframe: Alcohol is poison.

Some readers of that book lost all interest in alcohol and quit drinking forever because they read those three words "alcohol is poison."

Really.

How do I know that reframe will work on some (smallish) percentage of readers? Because several times a week I receive a thank-you message from yet another internet stranger who embraced that reframe and removed

alcohol from their lives. I don't have to wonder if it works—I hear about it first-hand from people who quit a lifetime of overdrinking and credit three words: "Alcohol is poison."

You have a few questions. I know. Here are your answers:

1. This reframe is not for alcoholics. Addiction is a different problem. Reframes work for breaking normal habits such as drinking socially or having a glass of wine each night.
2. No individual reframe works for 100 percent of people. Some work for only a few. Others are closer to universally useful. But if only 10 percent of the suggested reframes in this book work for you, your life will be transformed.
3. Perhaps you protest that it isn't TRUE that alcohol is poison like arsenic or cyanide! Correct. Reframes don't try to be "true" in a technical or philosophical sense. Reframes don't even need to be rational or logical. We judge reframes by how well they work. Period.

REFRAMES DON'T NEED TO BE TRUE.
THEY DON'T EVEN NEED TO BE LOGICAL.
THEY ONLY NEED TO WORK.

Is alcohol literally poison? No. Or maybe. Sort of. Depends. It doesn't matter. Your brain will process a lie—or any form of fiction—the same way it processes a truth. That's why a movie can make you laugh, cry, or feel inspired even while you know the story is made-up.

Our imaginations—whether driven by fiction or our own thoughts—have the same power as real experiences when it comes to rewiring our brains. You already know a dramatic experience in the real world can instantly rewire your brain to make you forever fear or love something that reminds you of that experience. But imagination—including reframing—can also rewire your brain over time. You simply need to focus and repeat the reframe in your head long enough for the hack to work.

In my case, every time someone offers me alcohol or asks why I don't drink, I say, "Alcohol is poison," either aloud or in my head. I have

repeated the reframe so many times it has become my truth in this subjective reality in which we live.

Is it hard for me to resist drinking? It used to be. Now I am puzzled by why anyone would drink poison for entertainment. My story that alcohol is poison has become my reality. But is alcohol poison? Yes, definitely. And by that, I mean maybe. Or not. Doesn't matter. I've reframed alcohol out of my life. That was the plan.

By the way, I'm not suggesting you need to stop drinking. That's not what I do. I'm here to give you the tools to reframe your brain however you like.

Reframes Are Safe

I won't ask you to trust me on the topic of reframing. I don't need to. The nature of reframes is that they are so safe, you can try as many as you like. See for yourself which ones work. When we get to more reframe suggestions in this book, you'll see they are all as safe as, "alcohol is poison."

Don't worry about accidentally breaking your own brain. We reprogram our brains all the time, to good effect. I'm just teaching you some ways to do it better.

For example, you wouldn't worry that learning to play a musical instrument will harm your brain, but you know it's rewiring your neural circuitry to develop those skills. Reframes are no more dangerous or exotic than learning a new skill. I'll trust you to know if any of these reframes feels risky to you, just as I would trust your decision to play an instrument, learn a new language, or take a college course. Everything you experience rewires your brain. I'm teaching you how to do it strategically instead of randomly.

The Technique

The simplest way to get the benefits of a reframe is to expose yourself to it. That's all it takes. And you're doing it right now by reading this book. You're doing a great job.

Any reframes that don't seem relevant to you will be soon forgotten, but a few are likely to become sticky in your mind. That stickiness is all you need. It creates focus and repetition—with no effort at all—and that's all it takes to rewire your brain. Adding some emotion helps, but it's optional.

The "alcohol is poison" reframe works because some people had a profound reaction to it from the start, and their minds kept returning to it when thoughts of alcohol popped up. That was enough focus and repetition to hack their brains. Others—especially non-drinkers—heard the reframe and probably never thought of it again. It wasn't important to them.

As a rule, the reframes you need will probably be sticky from the first exposure. The reframes you don't need will rapidly fade from memory.

Reframes You Already Know

It won't be hard to convince you how powerful reframing is because you've already been doing some version of it for years. Are any of these familiar?

In chaos there is opportunity.
It's darkest before the dawn.
The customer is always right.

Those are reframes. Note that none of them are "true" in any total sense, but all of them are useful. That's why they survive as old sayings; they work.

As I will often mention—no matter how much you hate it!—good reframes often have the weird quality of being untrue *literally* while still being useful. Take the first example on my list. It isn't true that chaos necessarily creates opportunities for any specific person or entity, but accepting it as true (enough) is a great way to improve your attitude and your odds of success in the long run.

If you learn to look for opportunities in chaos or in bad news of any kind, I guarantee you will spot some sooner or later. All you need to do is train yourself to look for the opportunities. I use this reframe a lot. The first thing I think when something falls apart is that an opportunity has been created. I still deal with the problem, of course, but I've rewired my brain via repetition to automatically look for the upside. I always find it.

Similarly, I'm sure it's not always *darkest before the dawn* in any real sense except that one of those things must always follow the other. But it predicts nothing about your specific situation. Nevertheless, rewiring your brain to think in that positive way can help you anticipate good news others do not see coming. It also keeps your anxiety in check when everyone else is saying the world is about to burn. It hasn't burned yet.

On to the third reframe, is *the customer always right*? Heck, no. A McDonald's employee recently told me about an elderly man at the drive-thru window who complained about McDonalds having an app. He said, "Why does McDonald's need an app now??? Is McDonalds planning to build an airport???"

It's not entirely clear what an airport has to do with the McDonalds app. That customer was not "right" in any coherent way. But that's not the point

of “the customer is always right.” It is not meant to be literally, universally true. It is meant to rewire your brain toward fixing problems instead of debating them. And it works.

This book introduces new and more powerful reframes, but they all have the same qualities as the old reliables: **They aren’t necessarily true, but they work.** Once you understand why that apparent contradiction can exist without any downside, you’ll know how to make your own reframes.

CHAPTER 1

How to Reprogram Your Brain

What does it take to rewire a brain? Not much. You only need three things, and one of them is optional:

Focus

Repetition

Emotion (fear, happiness, hate, love, passion, etc.)

You can rewire brains fastest with an emotional turbocharge, but focusing on and repeating a reframe without emotion will also get you where you want to go eventually. Your brain builds new structures in response to whatever stimuli you're pumping into it. Focus and repetition move an idea (or reframe) from conceptual to physical, meaning physical changes in your brain structure. Adding emotion can make the rewiring happen faster, but again, that part is optional.

If you want to add emotion to a reframe to give it more impact, you can start with a reframe that is conceptual, such as this familiar saying:

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

To add emotion to the reframe, think about what accomplishment this new strength will help you achieve. Do you need to gather strength to demand a raise or to win a competition? Focus on an emotionally powerful endpoint and imagine it often. That emotional energy will make the reframe burrow into your mind faster.

Writing and speaking on the topic of success for a few decades has taught me that people like their advice in simple, accessible forms. In addition to giving you the new reframes in this book, I also recast the strongest ideas from my prior work as reframes because that makes them easier to remember and share.

If you plan to share reframes with others—especially teens—it isn't always practical to ask them to read a book. But most people can digest and remember a two-sentence reframe. If they like what they hear, perhaps they will double-back later and read the source material (this book).

Reframes are easy to learn, easy to remember, often influential, and portable—which makes them easier to share, post, text, and embroider on a pillow. And you're about to experience a lot of them.

Because reframes are quick and easy to learn, I packed more than 160 of them in this book, which raises the odds that at least one of them will change your life.

That's enough priming. Let's get to the good stuff.

CHAPTER 2

Success Reframes

THE ODDS OF SUCCESS

Have you ever noticed how surprised some people are by their own successes? For every person who "knew they would be great" and succeeded, there are twenty who exceeded their own expectations. And that has always suggested to me that humans are bad at predicting their own success.

Personally, I've failed at most of the things I'm qualified for while succeeding at many thinGs I'm not qualified for. My education includes a degree in economics and an MBA from a top school. But I've had no luck as a banker or entrepreneur for a variety of reasons. On the flip side, I've done great in areas in which I had no experience or training whatsoever.

Qualified: Banker, entrepreneur

Unqualified: Cartoonist, author, public speaker, political pundit

That teaches me I'm terrible at estimating my own odds of success. So-called common sense didn't help me a bit. I suspect many people reading this book are in the same situation; you think you know what you would be good at, but you could be wildly wrong.

Usual Frame: My odds of success are low.

Reframe: Maybe I'm bad at estimating the odds.

Once you realize you're terrible at estimating the odds of your own success, you're free to try things you might otherwise not consider. You are allowed to expand beyond your comfort zone without pressure because the only way to know what will work is to test it for yourself.

I won't try to tell you that anyone can succeed at anything they want if they approach the challenge with enthusiasm and passion. That would be nuts. I probably succeed at about 10 percent of what I try no matter how hard I try, but I generally try a lot of long-shot ideas that could be huge if

they work. I only need one-out-of-ten to win big and I'm in good shape. This book, for example, is one of several projects I will have worked on this year. I might try adding an interview feature on my YouTube channel. Recently, I began testing my own funny-but-useful cooking show for people who don't know anything about at-home meal prep. I'll test several content ideas to see what catches on. A year from now, I'm sure I'll be able to say I tested ten different content ideas to see what created its own energy in my mind and among my audience. I've been testing ideas at about that rate of ten per year for decades, and I still have no idea in advance which will work out. I'm bad at estimating my own odds of success in any specific domain, so I compensate with volume. That's what I recommend for you, too. If the first thing you try doesn't work, try something else. You never know for sure what will click.

For example, you might go on ten dates before finding a good romantic match, or you might try ten side jobs before one fits and becomes your career. Think of it this way.

Usual Frame: I fail at 90 percent of the things I try.

Reframe: I only need to succeed 10 percent of the time.

You can choose to feel like a loser every time something doesn't work out, or you can reframe your situation as a winner's journey that might take some time. I recommend the winner's reframe.

WANTING VERSUS DECIDING

If you *want* something, you might be willing to work hard to get it within reason. But if you *decide* to have something, you will do whatever it takes.

Usual Frame: I want to do (something).

Reframe: I have decided to do (something).

If I were to make a list of all the business startups and other money-making schemes I've worked on during my career and then divide that long list into what worked out well and what failed, there would be a pattern. You wouldn't notice the pattern, but I would. The efforts that failed were all ones I *wanted* to succeed. And I worked hard to try to make them succeed. I

wasn't doing all-nighters or risking money I couldn't afford to lose, but I put in great effort and yes, some cash. None of those *wants* worked out.

Luckily, several business projects did work out. *Dilbert* became an international sensation, I wrote several bestselling books, and I was one of the highest paid speakers in the country for several years. To be fair, I was only able to do all of that because the original *Dilbert* comic strip took off. And there is one thing that stands out about that initial *Dilbert* success: I didn't *want* to be a successful cartoonist; I *decided* to be one. When I was offered a syndication contract in 1988—the ultimate big break for a cartoonist—I made a promise to myself that no matter what happened, I would never allow myself to look back and say I didn't work hard enough to make it a success.

I knew I was entering a field in which the odds of making it big were around 1 percent even *after* getting the syndication contract, which was already insanely unlikely. The syndication company sells comics to newspapers and web platforms and splits the money with the cartoonists. I had a contract but zero newspaper clients on day one. By the end of the first year of selling *Dilbert* comics to newspapers, only a few small newspapers were carrying the strip. At that point, seeing no hope of a big hit, the salespeople moved on to the next comic that was being launched. If *Dilbert* was going to succeed, I would need to make it happen on my own.

And so, I worked my day job while also writing and promoting the *Dilbert* comic for several years. I later wrote books and did licensing. For over ten years, I had the equivalent of three full-time jobs. I worked seven days a week, including holidays. I did everything I could do to promote the comic, putting 100 percent of my mind and body into it. For many of those years, I answered hundreds of emails per day from fans. I traveled the country for book signings and autograph sessions that would last hours. I did photoshoots and interviews several times per week for a decade. *Dilbert* was the first syndicated comic to be published on the Internet, which also took a lot of work.

On paper, my workload from those years looks impossible. If I had merely *wanted* to succeed, I don't think I could have lasted. But I didn't merely *want* to succeed, I *decided* to succeed. And once you decide, the psychology of the situation changes. My crushing workload felt like a privilege. I reminded myself that almost any cartoonist would want to trade

places with me. It was never easy, and it was never painless, but I was unstoppable because I had decided.

If you are wondering how you can know if the thing you desire is a want or a decision, I can help with that. It's easy. If you are not sure, you have not decided. If you decide, you won't have any doubt. That's what makes it a decision.

MANAGING ENERGY INSTEAD OF TIME

I've written approximately 11,000 comic strips since the beginning of my cartooning career in 1989. Nearly every one of those comics was written before 9:00 AM. If I write a joke at 5:00 AM, I usually like how it turns out. If I try writing a joke at 3:00 PM, I'll probably end up tossing out whatever I produce.

I think of this as managing energy, not time. I have exactly the right kind of energy for coffee-fueled creative writing in the morning. But a caffeine buzz is exactly the wrong kind of energy for *drawing* comics, as that requires a more relaxed vibe. So I write in the morning when writing is easy, and I draw in the evenings when drawing is easy. That's managing energy, not time.

Usual Frame: Manage your time.

Reframe: Manage your energy.

In my experience, the energy I have for a task is more important to the outcome than the amount of time I have allocated to do it. I can produce more in fifteen minutes with the right energy than four hours with the wrong energy.

Most creative people will tell you something similar. There is a time of day that works best for creative work and other times that do not work at all. The same holds for exercise. I have the right energy for exercise at about noon each day. So that's when I do it. And I assume I get better outcomes compared to exercising when I'm at low energy.

The secret to managing energy as opposed to time is to gain as much control as you can over your own schedule. If you have a boss, you might not have options about when you do what. If you have a spouse or family or pet or other obligation, those, too, can force you out of the more productive

and happy energy management mode into time management mode. That's why I say you should favor life choices that give you schedule flexibility. For example, if you get two job offers that seem equivalent but one gives you more schedule freedom, take the freedom. Likewise with relationships. If you are equally attracted to two people and need to choose, consider picking the one who gives you the most schedule freedom. Freedom is a good tiebreaker for decisions with unpredictable outcomes. (The other good tiebreaker is how much you will learn in one situation versus the other.)

When you manage energy instead of time, you might not get around to all the tasks that need to get done. The solution to that: Don't do those tasks. At least not today. If that sounds irresponsible, think of all the things that ever went wrong because you didn't get something done that was in the bottom 20 percent of your priorities. I'll do that exercise, too, right now, and if either of us thinks of even one example, I'll be amazed.

Okay, begin.

I'm done.

I got nothing. Neither did you, I'm guessing. The least-important 20 percent of your tasks are unlikely to have made a difference in your life. Let them go. It's hard at first, but you get used to it. There might be some blowback when certain tasks get postponed, but you can more than make up for that by being able to do your creative and important work when your energy is at its best.

The time-versus-energy tradeoff is embedded in most of your decisions, but perhaps you never thought of it that way. For example, your diet and fitness systems might take extra time out of your day, but you get that back in healthy energy.

Or perhaps you're lucky enough to have two potential romantic partners, and there's a difference in how much energy you feel with each. Follow the energy. That's a good signal.

If you're trying to decide between two career paths, you probably feel a distinct energy difference when you think of one versus the other. Don't ignore that.

When you're buying a car, most of that decision is practical and focused on your needs, but some car models give you a feeling that boosts your energy. Some don't. Sometimes, that feeling hits you every time you get near the vehicle. That's energy. Take the car that provides it.

And so it goes with most decisions in life—one path energizes you more than the other, no matter how they stack up in other dimensions. Energy isn't the only variable—I don't want to leave that impression—but after health and safety, it's near the top. Treat it that way, and life will surprise you on the upside.

KNOWING WHAT YOUR JOB IS

We are trained to believe our "job" is the set of tasks we accomplish for an employer in return for money. That's how I saw it until a CEO shared with me his approach to business. He viewed his career as a non-stop search for a better job and because of that changed jobs and companies often. Apparently it worked because he was the head of a company when I met him.

Usual Frame: Your job is what your boss tells you it is.

Reframe: Your job is to get a better job.

Don't confuse *your* job with the work your employer wants you to do. The boss might want you to process all the pending orders by quitting time, but *your* job is to get a better job. Everything else you do should service that reframe. If it doesn't help you leave the job you are in and upgrade, it might not be worth doing. But don't worry that this line of thinking feels sociopathic—doing a good job on your assigned duties is one way to look good for promotions.

The reframe reminds us to be in continuous job-search mode, including on the first day of work at a new job. If that sounds unethical, consider that your employer would drop you in a second if the business required it. In a free market, you can do almost anything that is normal and legal. Changing jobs—for any reason you want—is normal. Your employer's job is to take care of the shareholders. It's your job to take care of you. That doesn't always mean acting selfishly. If being generous with your time and energy seems as if it will have the better long-term payoff, do that.

Your employer might want to frame employees as "a family," which is common, but that's to divert you from the fact that they can fire you at will. They don't want you to know you have the same power to fire them. Part of the job of leadership is convincing you that what is good for the leader is

good for you. Sometimes that is the case but keep your priorities clear. You are number one.

When I recommend being selfish in the job market, I expect you to know that approach works best when dealing with a big corporation. A small business might require a more generous approach.

When your workplace reframe is that your job is to get a better job, that helps you make decisions that work in your favor. For example, if you're offered a choice of two different projects at work, pick the one that teaches you a valuable skill, lets you show off what you can do, or lets you network with people who can help you later. Don't make the mistake of picking the project that has the most value to the company if doing so has the least value to you. Sometimes your best career move is to do exactly what your boss asks, especially if it's critical to the company. You'll know those situations when you see them. Don't lose sight of your mission: Get a better job.

BOREDOM

Boredom is an underappreciated asset for success. We think of it as a lack of action, and it is. But it is a far better starting point for your journey to success than having too much fun to get serious about your future. Life rewards action over inaction, and boredom is exactly the kind of mental state people need to organically trigger them into acting.

But what kind of action? That matters.

When you're bored with life and directionless, the fastest way out is to ramp up your risk of embarrassment. After all, what do you have to lose? The simplest way to embarrass yourself is by trying to do something you know you don't do well … in front of witnesses.

A recreational ax-throwing business recently opened near where I live. Throwing an ax at a target isn't as easy as it looks. You must judge the rotation of the ax just right or the handle hits the target with a humiliating *thunk* before falling to the ground in disgrace. If it's your first time with an ax, you're guaranteed to look like a boneless chicken trying to juggle bowling pins. Invite some friends and embarrass yourself. You won't be bored.

If you're single, ask out someone you believe is above your self-assessed pulling power. If they say no, you lose nothing but your boredom. Take a chance and let yourself flame out and fail if that's what fate has in mind. You might be lucky and find the love of your life. Or you might get slapped down so hard it makes a funny story. But you won't be bored, and you'll be hardened for the next pothole life presents you. I'm already proud of you in advance for the smart risks of embarrassment you will be taking.

If you're looking to advance your career, this is the time to scare the bejeezus out of yourself by asking for a raise that is so aggressive you worry your boss will either laugh or fire you on the spot. That's not boring! Or see if you can get partners to invest in you or work with you on a new business. Or sign up for a training class that could change your life. You have many options for scaring yourself in productive ways. Boredom is nature's way to remind you to do that.

Usual Frame: I am bored with life.

Reframe: I am not embarrassing myself enough.

I sometimes think of this reframe as a "game mode" in which I can practice doing awkward or embarrassing things I would ordinarily avoid. And it's all "free money," as I like to say, because almost anything is better than being bored.

Have you ever caused trouble just because you were bored? If you have, you know exactly what I mean. But I recommend being more strategic about your troublemaking. Don't pick the kind of trouble that benefits no one. Pick the kind of risks that will have a good payoff if things work out.

If I haven't yet persuaded you to take on more risk of embarrassment, here's another reframe.

Usual Frame: Embarrassment is something to be avoided.

Reframe: Embarrassment is an investment.

In the short run, embarrassment can sting. In the long run, you will be tougher for the experience, and you might have a funny story to tell. You almost always come out ahead when you take a hard shot to your ego and survive to play again. And some of those potential embarrassments turn into life-changing victories that couldn't have happened without putting yourself out there. So the next time you see an opportunity to embarrass yourself,

repeat “cha-ching” (the cash register sound) in your mind instead of “oh-no.”

Learning to laugh at your own embarrassments is one of the most useful skills a person can develop. It can help you financially, socially, and mentally, as the next reframe explains, by helping you better understand reality and deal with it more successfully.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Cognitive dissonance is an illusion your brain generates to explain a discrepancy between who you think you are and how you act. For example, if you think you’re smart but you observe yourself doing something dumb, you’re not likely to revise your belief about yourself. Your worldview is linked to your understanding of who you are in relation to the rest of the world. Revising your entire understanding of yourself would be a huge mental expense, and it wouldn’t be fast or painless. By comparison, it takes almost no energy to hallucinate that your dumb actions were really brilliance in disguise because, as you will explain it to friends, “frogs are basically dogs.”

That last part about the frogs and dogs is just an example of the type of “word salad” nonsense a person experiencing cognitive dissonance typically exhibits.

Now here’s the fun part. How often do you think normal humans experience this weird phenomenon? If you’re not a hypnotist and not a cognitive psychologist, you probably think it’s rare. But if you have some experience in this domain, you see it as a fundamental human experience. We are *always* in a subjective bubble of reality of our own making, one which requires cognitive dissonance. So it isn’t rare. It’s the opposite—closer to universal. Understand this and you understand people.

On social media, common sense suggests that political disagreements emerge from different priorities, different information, and sometimes different levels of reasoning skills. Sometimes political debates look like pure teamplay with no regard to reason. But once you learn to spot cognitive dissonance, you realize it explains about 60 percent of all the “crazy” opinions you see.

If you want to burst out of the cognitive dissonance bubble so you can see the world as it is—yourself included—I have a reframe that can help. I wrote this as an absolute to keep it simple, but let's agree you are not always wrong or always hallucinating.

Usual Frame: Being wrong is embarrassing and should be avoided.

Reframe: Fear of embarrassment forces you to be wrong.

Notice we harken back to the previous reframe about boredom and embarrassment. Fear of embarrassment is the main reason people don't like to admit they are wrong. And that's what causes cognitive dissonance. When you discover you were wrong about something important, your brain fixes that for you by hallucinating you were right all along—for reasons that will sound to others like word salad. But imagine if you were never embarrassed in life, about anything. If you were wrong about something, you would simply say so and never fret about it again. If your friends mocked you for being wrong, you would join in the fun.

The opposite would happen if you were susceptible to shame and embarrassment. In that case, your brain might insta-generate a hallucination that you were right all along, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. For example, if you imagined you were a subject matter expert and some non-expert annihilated your opinion in an undeniable way, that would trigger a hallucination. You might hallucinate that your critic is a foreign spy and dismiss them as a troublemaker. You might hallucinate that you "keep answering the question" while never doing anything of the sort. A hallucination can take any form, from a false memory to the false belief that the words you're saying make sense.

I have a lot of experience identifying cognitive dissonance because I intentionally trigger people into it on X as a demonstration for my followers. I've started telling my audience in advance when my debate participant will start the word salad phase, and sure enough, it happens on cue. All I need to do is point out an obvious flaw in an argument. When I'm wrong, the response is a normal counterpoint that sounds sensible, even if I don't agree. When I'm right, the response reads like a jargon-generator having a meltdown. Very different and easy to spot. A public display of cognitive dissonance is far more embarrassing than admitting you were wrong. Between the two, the latter is easy. It just takes some practice. I

recommend putting yourself in potentially embarrassing situations until it becomes easy to ignore the sensation, the same way you hone any skill—you train. You test. You experiment.

I use another hack as well, which you might be able to replicate in your own way. I repurpose my "mistakes" into content for my daily livestream shows, which makes me more relatable to the audience. They also create a learning opportunity. Why was I wrong? What illusion bamboozled me? What gap in my reasoning skills caused the problem? By turning my mistakes into content, I can welcome them instead of hiding from them. Cognitive dissonance gets no problem to solve in my case—I need no illusions to explain my place in the universe because I know everyone makes mistakes. My self-image stays intact, so there is no trigger for hallucinating.

You don't have a livestreaming show (probably), so that specific hack won't be for you. You can still generalize the concept for presenting yourself to others. Do you have an "always right" brand that would make you vulnerable to a better argument or better data? When the "always right" are proven wrong, they hallucinate. But if you can, for example, cultivate a reputation that can handle being spectacularly wrong without offending your sense of self, do that. It will make you the only person in the room who can see the whole field. Others will be obsessed with being right, and that becomes the fuel for their own hallucinations.

I also recommend detaching your sense of self from any "team" in politics. The moment you join a team, your brain will start feeding you one hallucination after another about the wonderfulness of your side and the horribleness of the other. That's why I don't identify as Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal. If any group comes up with a good idea, my brain won't fight it. That means no trigger for cognitive dissonance.

I can almost hear your thoughts as you read this, screaming at me in your head that I have no way to know if I have reduced my cognitive dissonance with the techniques I described. Maybe I am having the sort of hallucination I keep assigning to others. How would I know?

You get an A+ for that insightful criticism. By definition, a person experiencing cognitive dissonance does not know it is happening. I would be no different. It's within the realm of possibility that I wrote this entire chapter while hallucinating.

See what I did there? I admitted I could be hallucinating. That's a hack for reducing the odds of it happening. When you accept your human nature, you remove the need to defend yourself to avoid embarrassment.

If you have a strong opinion about something and see a trigger for your own cognitive dissonance, don't ignore it. And if you disagree with someone spewing word salad and see the trigger for them, you're probably right about who is hallucinating.

My final note on this is that I have never seen anyone get talked out of cognitive dissonance. The best you can do is put a crack in the wall and hope that someday makes it easier for the sufferer to break out on their own. I mention this so you don't get frustrated by thinking you are in a debate with a reasonable person when nothing of the sort is happening.

HOW TO START SOMETHING BIG

Have you ever wanted to do something substantial in your personal or work life but couldn't motivate yourself to start? A reframe can fix that.

Usual Frame: The effort is so big and daunting I can't even start.

Reframe: What's the smallest thing I can do that moves me in the right direction?

Momentum can often create more momentum, especially if you find "fuel" along the way, like the way some video games work; you can only complete your mission if you find energy sources as you go. I treat the real world as if it's that kind of video game—by starting journeys without knowing how I'll get the fuel to complete them. I have faith that good projects become somewhat self-fueling, so after an initial nudge, they will start dragging me along for the ride. Instead of draining my energy, they become suppliers.

Take the writing of this book as an example. Do you have any idea how hard it is to write a book? IT'S REALLY, REALLY HARD. It's so hard I generally take a few years off after writing one. And I suspect I never would have written a second book if I had accurately remembered how hard the first one was. I've written a dozen books or so, not counting the fifty(ish) *Dilbert* comic reprint books. At this point in my career, I have a full understanding of how hard the book-writing process is—in the sense that I

could explain it to you—but I still have partial amnesia about HOW BAD IT FEELS when doing it. Instead of treating that memory problem as a defect, I reframe it as an advantage. It's how I trick myself into succeeding. It's a two-step scheme:

Step 1: Forget how unpleasant it is to write a book.

Step 2: Take the first tiny step of writing a new book and see what happens.

Here is how my project to write this book unfolded, which is a typical scenario for me. Notice how I found fuel along the way.

I jotted "reframing book" on the whiteboard in my man cave after thinking about the topic for months. For me, writing down an idea is the first step in manifesting something out of nothing. Progress feels good, no matter how small. It fueled me to talk about the idea with others.

I mentioned the book idea on livestream to get feedback. The overwhelming positive replies fueled me to the next step.

So I talked to my literary agent about the idea. My agent's enthusiasm for the idea fueled me further.

My literary agent talked to my first-choice publisher. The publisher's enthusiasm fueled me.

Then I started turning my rough notes into chapter ideas. When chapters start forming out of nothing, it feels like progress. That fueled me, too.

As I write this sentence … hold on, let me take a photo.

After a few months of not finding enough time to write in the rolling chaos that is my home, I decided to go on a solo writer's retreat and make the work as painless as possible. I'm sitting in that chair now, and I must tell you this isn't a bad experience. I'm being refueled by the insane beauty of Hawai'i as I write. The summary of my creative process looks like this:

Take a tiny step, look for fuel. Take another step, look for more fuel. Keep going until you are done.

The next time you have a big project or challenge, ask yourself *what is the smallest thing* you can do today to move it forward. Then do it and see if you find more fuel. If not, it probably isn't your calling, or at least not yet. But I would still try a few more tiny steps to see if something brings you fuel. If not, move on.

SYSTEMS VERSUS GOALS

In my 2013 book *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big*, I introduced two reframes that changed the world. That's a big claim, and I invite you to be skeptical about any claim of that scale. But it happens to be true. Once you see these two reframes, you will start noticing them

incorporated in the advice of nearly everyone in the business of giving advice. Here is the first one.

Usual Frame: Success requires setting goals.

Reframe: Systems are better than goals.

According to my reframe, a system is something you do every day to create good options for yourself in the future. Some people conflate systems with "practice," which is also a type of system, but not the whole story. ***The best systems give you many options.*** Ordinary "practice" might be preparing you for exactly one thing, which may be the right thing to do (or not). So practice alone is not nearly as useful as a system that prepares you for multiple opportunities. Being flexible and prepared for anything is a good position to be in if you live in a rapidly evolving world.

A few examples will help you.

Getting a college education is a *system* because it gives you multiple career options. You might have a general sense of where your career will go, but you are (usually) not over-specifying it. And that's good because your preferences and your opportunities change all the time. It's safest to develop skills that can fit a variety of situations.

Learning to be a plumber might be a great career path, but it isn't an ideal system because it limits you to that one profession. Systems increase options; they never limit them. To fix a plumber's career path with a better system, I would advise them either to learn business skills to grow by hiring employees, or to acquire other trade skills with the long-term goal of being a general contractor. In my example, if the plumber ends up renovating and flipping houses instead, using the full set of skills to get it done, that was not necessarily contemplated as a goal, but the plumber prepared for a variety of opportunities and selected this one when it became an option. By way of contrast, a plumber who achieved the *goal* of learning the trade probably has a boss and a paycheck, but not much else.

A big downside of long-term goals without systems is that every day you do not meet the goal, you are in a mental state of something like failure. But when you have a system, you can feel success every day. For example, if your system involves exercising daily, you are successful if all you did was take a walk. But if your goal is to lose twenty pounds, you will feel like less than a winner every day until you reach the goal. And that's only if you

don’t get discouraged first. Compare that to a system of being active every day and continuously learning what foods are good for you. You can work your system every day, confident it will produce results. That’s continuous winning. It feels great.

Goals are not worthless. They come in handy for any situation in which the objective is clear and there are no just-as-good options. Examples include scoring high on a test, winning a sporting competition, and running a marathon. But when it comes to career, love, and health, you want to prepare yourself to embrace the best opportunity that pops up. It’s a fast world. Be a fast learner and a fast mover.

For a deeper dive into systems—for everything from career to fitness to romance to diet—see my book *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big.*

TALENT STACKS

I mention Talent Stacks in this book several times in connection to other reframes, but it is a major reframe itself. The Talent Stack reframe is the second world-changer I introduced in *How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big*. A talent stack is a collection of skills that work well together to make you valuable and rare in a wide variety of ways. This is far different from the classic advice about focusing on being the best at some specific skill. That might have made more sense in an earlier time. But in a fast-moving world, you can’t predict what next year looks like. That means your best odds of happiness are closely associated with how flexible your talent stack is.

Usual Frame: Focus on being excellent at a skill that has commercial value.

Reframe: Acquire skills that ***work well together*** and make you rare and flexible at the same time.

The simplest example of building a talent stack that meets my specs is adding public speaking skills to any big-company job. That one skill set makes you the obvious choice for promotion to manager. It also makes you a better candidate for a variety of lateral and upward career moves.

If you also add effective listening skills, business writing, contract negotiation, and some people skills, not much can stop you. And you could learn that entire stack of skills in a month without breaking a sweat.

On my Locals subscription site—scottadams.locals.com—I have recorded over 200 micro lessons, most of them less than four minutes in length. Each teaches you a new useful life skill. In a few weeks, you could rewire your brain with over 200 new skills, building upon your existing awesomeness. Would you want to compete with someone who had developed 200 skills in one month? I wouldn't, and I'm the one who created the lessons.

I have consciously followed a system of acquiring complementary skills my entire adult life. When my corporate employers offered to pay for a class, I took it. When I saw an article purporting to teach me how to sleep better, or do anything better, I read and absorbed it.

Here is a snapshot of the most useful entries in my talent stack so you can see how they have guided my strange career path:

Economics degree

Business degree (MBA)

Hypnotist
Computer programmer (minor tech skills)

Writing

Drawing
Humor writing

Banker

Manager
Entrepreneur
Public speaker
Drummer (work in progress)
Livestreaming (podcasting)
Touch-typing (a bigger advantage than it sounds)
Design skills

PR skills

What I hope you notice about my collection is how well they work together to make me more than the sum of my parts. With my unique talent stack, I can become a cartoonist who has many windows into life, or I could be a podcaster who analyzes the news, or I could go on the speaking circuit, or I could write books on a variety of topics. I do all those things.

Did one item on the list—drumming—seem as though it doesn't work with the rest of the skills on my list? I'm learning to drum because I believe it will give me another window into persuasion. I might incorporate it into my podcasting. All I know for sure is that few things are as persuasive as a dance beat, and I want to see what I learn from figuring out how to create one.

I don't recommend replicating my talent stack. You should start with your natural talents and interests and figure out what else plays well with them. Here are some examples:

If you like finance, learn to be a good communicator and your options multiply.

If you speak a second language, start a business (or work for one) that puts your linguistic advantage to use.

If you have a real estate license, learn to manage rental properties. Those work well together.

Some years ago, a young man sat in my kitchen and asked me how I would go about designing a career for him. I knew he had artistic talent and an interest in tech. So I told him to learn user interface design and build up his graphic arts portfolio. Combine those skills, and you can add value to big companies and startups alike. I didn't hear from the young man for several years. When I finally did, he reported that he followed my talent stack strategy —Apple had just hired him for lucrative contract work in his field. He has since moved on to an even better job because he could. Last time we spoke, he was learning how to code. He will never have trouble finding good work that pays well.

BURDENS AND PUZZLES

Life likes to toss problems at us with such regularity it sometimes feels as if we signed up for the Burden-of-the-Week Club. Each of these challenges requires some cleverness, hard work, or some other discomfort to handle. I've

learned I can change my cranky “why me???” attitude by reframing my current burden as a puzzle in need of a solution.

Obviously, it is harder to be playful when your problems involve life and death. But most of the time, we are just figuring out how to be in two places at the same time and other ordinary impossibilities of life. Usually, we surprise ourselves by how cleverly we work through one problem after another, but it all seems like a huge bother.

Usual Frame: Another problem! Why me???

Reframe: Ooh, a new puzzle to solve.

Amazingly, this absurd little reframe almost instantly makes me feel less bothered by my problems. In effect, I gamify my burdens and challenge myself to find smart solutions.

Humans are good at solving problems. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be here. Some of us are better than others, but we all seem to get through the challenges of the day. Today is unlikely to be different. Tell yourself your burdens are puzzles to solve—see if that changes how you feel. Remember, not all reframes work for all people. I wouldn’t have imagined this one working for me if I hadn’t tried it so many times with success.

I also recommend gamifying your repetitive tasks such as folding laundry, straightening up the house, or making the bed. You do this by treating the “skill” involved as a serious endeavor. For example, I can fold a bath towel so quickly and capably I feel like a circus performer. Every folded towel gives me a little dopamine release. And that’s what makes it a game. I chase the tiny dopamine releases. A good fold literally feels good. By the time I fold six towels, I’m delighted with my own hand-eye-coordination. Strange but true.

I do something similar with straightening up the house. Instead of picking up one item at a time or maybe a few and putting them back in the rooms where they belong, I survey the space and calculate the shortest distance to each item. Then I scoop them up and put them at the exit points to their destinations. But I don’t deliver them to their destination until I have a reason to be walking in that direction for some other reason. By bedtime, all the little piles have been redistributed to their homes, and I feel a dopamine release associated with my pride of minor competence.

Humans evolved to be happier when moving and doing. Household chores satisfy that need, and with a little gamification, they can be sources of

dopamine. It simply feels good to do a necessary task efficiently. I don't think people are too different in that regard.

Usual Frame: Ugh, I hate this repetitive chore.

Reframe: I can do this chore so gracefully and efficiently it feels like a game.

PASSION

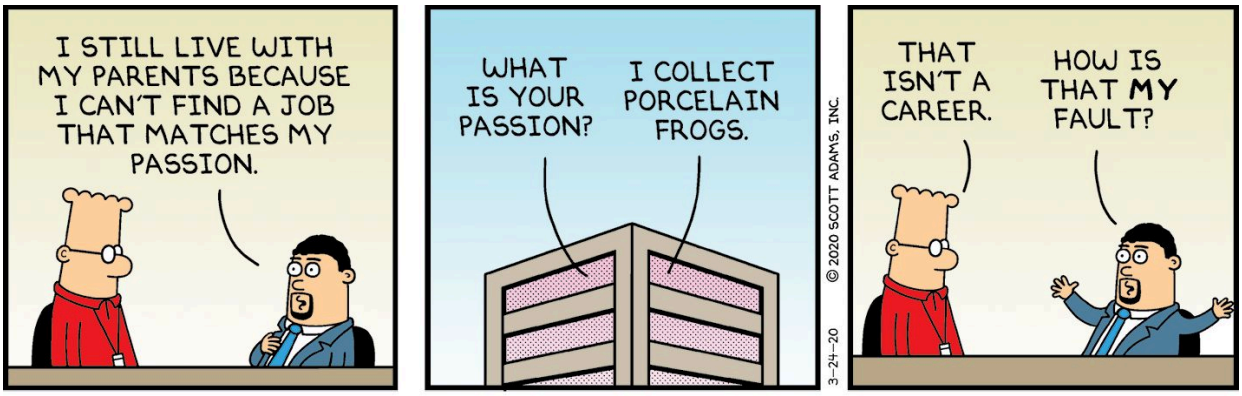
When you ask successful people about their secrets for success, they often say "passion" is the key. That's only because successful people don't want to tell you they are smarter than you, took bigger risks, got lucky, inherited money, broke the law, or had some other advantage not available to you. This is how rich people like me prevent the public from killing us to take our stuff. We create a fictional story about how you, too, can get everything rich people have —if you just dial up your "passion" a bit.

It's total baloney. You do need enough energy and enthusiasm to push through the hard times to succeed. But that's obvious. Energy and enthusiasm don't have the same "zing" passion does even though they're both orders of magnitude more important for making something of yourself. Personally, I've never NOT been aggressive about my career, no matter what direction it took. I wouldn't call it passion. I simply tried different things until something worked. I was lucky my big break was cartooning because that also gave me a good lifestyle without commuting. But I would have been happy working at a startup and probably equally successful in the long run. Passion has never been part of my process.

Usual Frame: Passion is the key to success.

Reframe: Passion is nice but not required.

If you succeed at anything, passion is likely to find you after the fact. It feels good to succeed, especially if there are witnesses. In my experience, success is most related to your systems, your talent stack, and your ability to go where the energy already is. You also must check the obvious boxes like work hard, stay healthy, and avoid jail. I'll trust you to get the easy stuff right. Then get your systems and talent stack in order, and you'll do fine.


I STILL LIVE WITH MY PARENTS BECAUSE I CAN'T FIND A JOB THAT MATCHES MY PASSION.
WHAT IS YOUR PASSION?
I COLLECT PORCELAIN FROGS.
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3-24-20
THAT ISN'T A CAREER.
HOW IS THAT MY FAULT?

MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING

A common truism is that it takes money to make money. If you already have a million dollars, your odds of making a second million are much higher than the odds of someone with zero dollars making their first million. I have lived that truth for decades. When I got rich making the *Dilbert* comic strip, all kinds of other business opportunities popped up. I got offers for speaking engagements, book deals, licensing, movies, and more. Success breeds success, and monetary success breeds more monetary success. Money makes everything easier.

If you don't already have money but you have ambition to be more than a wage slave all your life, there are some well-worn paths for turning the "nothing" you have into real money. It starts with this reframe.

Usual Frame: It takes money to make money.

Reframe: I can turn energy into money.

Obviously the energy must be applied in the right places, and I don't mean working for a paycheck. I mean working on yourself until others see *you* as money. Here are some methods for doing just that.

Reciprocity

If you can find a way to provide value to someone at a low or reasonable cost to yourself, you can create an asset out of "nothing." Humans are wired to reciprocate. Do a favor for someone who has access to many resources, someone who hires people, or someone who knows a lot of people, and your odds of someday getting something tangible in return are good.

Usual Frame: Don't give something for nothing.

Reframe: Giving triggers reciprocity (on average).

Give More Than Expected

If I could only give you one piece of career advice, it would be to always give more than is expected of you. When you do that, you instantly stand out as a person of character. And doing more than expected is almost always doable. For example, you might go out of your way to thank someone for a job well-done, or you might offer to stay late to help a coworker finish a project. Whenever an expectation about your actions is established, ask yourself what it would take to exceed it. There is no simpler formula for social and career success.

Who is the first person you think of when you think about people who give more than expected? Ask yourself how much you respect that person. I'll bet you have a favorable opinion, and that's the point. You can create an asset out of nothing by creating a pattern that says working with you is always a good deal.

Usual Frame: Do your job.

Reframe: Do more than your job.

Networking

Who you know is almost as important as how much value you can add to the world. The more people you know, the more likely someone will recommend you for an opportunity you didn't know existed. Meeting people and forming connections is a skill, and it won't cost you much to do it. This book is not a how-to on networking, and frankly I'm not especially good at it. But many people have added me to their networks over the years, and more than a few ended up happy about it. Networking doesn't guarantee success, but it is by far the strongest way to create something from nothing. You might need to work on your social skills before tackling this. I always recommend the Dale Carnegie courses for that. You can probably find a local class.

You can't know for sure if you have met all the people who can ever help you in your career, so compensate for that by meeting as many people as you can. Networking is a numbers game. Get your numbers up.

Usual Frame: Success depends on who you know.

Reframe: Success depends on *how many* people you know.

Working Late

If you have bosses, make sure those bosses see you at work when they arrive and see you still working when they leave. This is especially important for a first impression. Make sure your new boss sees you as the "whatever it takes" person who isn't afraid of hard work. You might be getting to work five minutes before your boss and leaving five minutes after. That's all it takes to be in the top 10 percent of most work groups. No one likes to work extra hours for no extra pay, but doing so is free and has a high likelihood of making you stand out.

Usual Frame: Your hard work will be rewarded.

Reframe: The illusion of hard work will be rewarded.

I'm not suggesting you cheat your employer. I'm only saying you will benefit by making sure your employer has the impression you are a superstar worker. Avoid being a self-assured employee who needs no external validation. That can get you fired first in any rounds of downsizing.

Taking Initiative

In a world of followers, leaders stand out. Take initiative any time people are around to notice. It won't take that much extra work, and it puts you at the top of the promotion list.

Years ago in my banking career, I put together a visual timeline of the bank's mainframe computer lease expirations to make it easier for management to do capital budgeting. My boss chastised me for spending time doing something outside my job description, but I convinced her to show it to the big boss, a Senior Vice President. His feedback was that it was terrific and solved a big problem, and he wanted to see more like that.

Obviously, the initiative you show must appear valuable or else it is a waste of time, but you can generally predict what will appear valuable.

Usual Frame: Do what you are told.

Reframe: Do what you are NOT told but maybe someone should have.

When you take initiative in front of others, they will trust you are the kind of person who takes care of business when no one is watching. Everyone wants to hire that person. Doing what you are told gets you a paycheck. Doing what you are NOT told (but is useful) gets you promoted. It also prepares you to be an entrepreneur if you want that in your future.

Continuous Learning

As mentioned earlier, a powerful way to make something out of nothing involves building a talent stack—a set of skills that work well together. Learning isn't free, but it can be close to free if your employer pays for career-advancing classes or if you learn on your own online. Developing valuable skills is the main way any adult turns nothing into something. If you are not actively learning something of potential commercial value—all the time—you might be leaving money on the table.

Usual Frame: Learn what you need.

Reframe: Learn continuously, especially skills that work well together.

Honesty

Honesty is a rare superpower. Outside of family members, you probably only know a handful of people you trust to do the right thing when there are no witnesses.

Keeping your word and being consistent about it creates an asset that is hard to compete with in today's sketchy world. I have a handful of friends I trust completely, which is an incredible resource for them to have. If any of them asked me for a favor, I would say yes before hearing the details. Each of them created that asset—my potential assistance on some future endeavor—by being high-character people. It cost them nothing.

Fitness

Fitness is one of the most controllable variables for success, so control it completely. It's like free money. Fitness has a ripple effect that benefits everything from your career to your personal life. We humans are shallow, and we automatically respond to the fitness of people we meet. Get in shape and you will see the difference in how people treat you. When you feel strong and healthy, you can take on bigger challenges, too.

Last night, I accidentally got enough sleep for the first time in four decades or so. I woke up ready to conquer the world, break down any door, slay any monster. Fitness, sleep, and diet are all power boosters if you do them right. And when your personal energy is high, you feel confident you can take on bigger challenges. People will notice and want to be around you.

That's an asset you built from nothing—all by maintaining your body in a smart way.

Be Dependable

It doesn't cost you anything to show up to work when you say you will or to complete assignments on time. When you call in sick on too many Mondays and Fridays, you do the opposite. Dependability is an asset you can acquire with a little bit of effort. It's worth it.

By the time I was fourteen, I had already developed a work habit of showing up early, working hard, not complaining, and not causing trouble in any way. If someone needed a hand, I happily pitched in. None of those things are hard to do. I would have happily hired my fourteen-year-old self for just about any job a teen can handle. Being among the best teen workers for your employer is one of the easiest things you can do. And being among the best adult workers in your group isn't that much harder. You don't need to be perfect to succeed. You only need to be better than most of the people with whom you work. And the bar for that is low.

If you are starting with nothing but your energy and character, that's enough to launch a successful career—if you follow the recipe in this chapter to build your value, especially through the acquisition of compatible skills.

BINARY THINKING

King of late-night television, Greg Gutfeld, calls this the Prison of Two Ideas. In politics, on social issues, and in our personal lives, we tend to pick sides as if there are only two. If someone proposes an idea, we treat it as either bad or good. It will either work or fail. Yes or no.

In the real world, things are messy. Often the best you can do is create friction to reduce some behaviors while adding incentives to increase other behaviors. In both cases, you'd be lucky if you can nudge the problem a little bit. Rarely can you solve a problem 100 percent.

So lose the yes-no framing for all your political, personal, and business decisions. Look instead for the friction (penalties) or the incentives to make your decisions.

Usual Frame: A plan will either work or not

Reframe: Friction and incentives always work. We just don't know how well until they are tested.

You might be scratching your head and wondering who needs to learn this reframe. Doesn't everyone already know friction and incentives change behavior?

Yes, but reframes don't care what you already know. They don't care what is true. They don't care what is logical. They work mindlessly to tune your brain for better performance. The need for this reframe arose because society has become so polarized we take sides reflexively and lose our ability to appreciate risk, friction, motivation, and everything else that requires nuanced thinking.

"Friction and incentives always work" is a strong high-ground position to take when you are judging a plan, especially combined with a call for testing to find out. It's hard for anyone to have a stronger take than that, so capture that high ground first before someone else gets there. You'll look like the smartest person in the room.

PLANNING

It was once common sense to be super-careful about how you spent money or used other resources. That made sense when resources were limited and hard to replace. Today, if you have a startup, for example, it may make sense to spray some ideas into the world and use up some resources to see what happens. You can learn by failing fast and cheaply. Every situation is different, so I'll trust you to know when "measuring twice and cutting once" makes sense and when it doesn't.

Usual Frame: Measure twice, cut once.

Reframe: Just start. See if you can figure it out as you go.

Doing your research before acting will always make sense. But like most good things, there can be too much of it. If your caution and research prevent you from acting and the consequences of tiptoeing into a project are not dramatic, you might be better off jumping in to see if you can sink or swim.

For example, I became one of the highest paid speakers on the professional speakers' circuit for years. I got there by being terrible at the

start and learning by failing until I achieved some baseline competence. It helped that I am immune from embarrassment, but that's a separate topic.

If you saw the batch of *Dilbert* comics I submitted to comic syndicates to start my career, you would be amazed how poorly drawn they were. And I doubt you would find them funny. Luckily for me, one editor—Sarah Gillespie, editor at what was United Media—spotted some kind of "voice" in my writing that she believed she could tease out. And she did. In other words, I started before I knew how to finish, and I figured it out.

The universe rewards action over inaction. The exception is when you need to invest more money than you can afford to lose or take some other drastic risk. In those cases, I don't recommend jumping in before you know what your plan is. But for most decisions in modern times, you can test the first step and see what happens before going any further.

A simpler way to make this point is that you should favor action over caution when the cost of taking the wrong action is low. Drawing some bad comics and embarrassing myself at a speaking event are low-cost risks. It made sense to take them.

But don't take out a second mortgage on your house to open a cat-petting cafe unless you have done a *lot* of research first. You'll recognize the situations in which more caution is appropriate.

SCHOOLWORK

I don't know anyone who enjoys studying. It's boring and painful. The reframe that I found useful in my school days involved treating tests as competitive events. I didn't mind doing work to win a competitive event. But I hated studying on the promise it would be useful someday in the future. That wasn't motivating.

The following reframe can only work for someone who is competitive by nature. If you tell me doing something hard and boring will help me win a competition, I want to get going on that hard and boring stuff right away!

Usual Frame: School is boring but necessary.

Reframe: School is a competitive event. Game on.

In my school days, it was common for teachers to let the rest of the class know who did the best on tests, which motivated me to compete for the

honor. To be honest, I wouldn't have competed if I didn't think I could win often enough to make it worth trying. So the competition has to be realistic. I recommend competing against someone specific in your class—a friend or even a nemesis—but choose someone you have a chance of beating on a good day. You don't need to tell anyone you are competing. Just compete.

Usual Frame: Compete against yourself and try to improve over time.

Reframe: Compete against others even if the others are unaware of the competition.

It isn't an accident that sports and politics attract so much energy. Apparently, we evolved to compete for resources and mates, an instinct we can't turn off. We want to look capable compared to those around us because that's the best way to attract both resources and mates. If you tap into that primal energy—the driving force of all human evolution—you will give yourself far more energy to study harder and longer than if you are studying because someone once told you it would help you later in life.

I'm not recommending a win-at-all-costs mentality. I don't think that's healthy for most of us. I'm making the mundane observation that all managers know: If you don't measure, you are not managing. It's fun and healthy to watch improvement in your own performance, but if you want enough energy to operate at your highest potential, consider a real or imagined competition with someone close to your abilities. Competition is what gets your energy up. Good intentions and discipline are not enough.

MOTIVATING PEOPLE

If you see someone do something wrong, the normal impulse is to point out the error and explain how to do it right. In a life-and-death situation or for anything critical, that's exactly the right thing to do—get to the point.

But most things are not urgent. Much of life involves teaching people how to do something you know how to do but they do not. That could involve instructing kids, coworkers, customers, whoever. If you're good at it, people want you to be the boss, or at least have more responsibility. So become good at motivating people. It gives you options.

My first comics editor was a genius at criticizing the work of artists without hurting their feelings. My favorite saying of hers was, "Your other work is stronger." It was a compliment and a criticism at the same time. I laughed when she used it on me. And that was a good outcome, too. This reframe starts with that gem and adds some examples you can build from.

Usual frame: You did this wrong.

Reframe: Your other work is stronger.

Alternate: I think you can top that.

Alternate: I'm not sure it's possible to do this better, but let's find out.

Alternate: May I show you a shortcut/trick?

Alternate: Let me show you how some people do it.

People generally want to do good work. Showing someone a better way is often all you need. Don't ruin it with a judgy attitude. If you have the luxury of time so people can work out the right way to do things mostly on their own, your best strategy is to compliment what they do right and avoid any criticisms at all.

Most criticism falls into the obvious category, meaning the subject of the criticism is aware of what they did wrong. People usually know when they mess up and why. What they need is extra energy and mental strength to get past the mistake. For that, be the motivator who ignores mistakes as if they don't exist and serves up dopamine treats in the form of compliments for what has been done well. This is a Dale Carnegie method, and I have observed it work wonders for all types of people.

Usual Frame: Tell people what they did wrong so they avoid it next time.

Reframe: Tell people what they did well so they are motivated to continue improving.

LUCK: REVERSING A LOSING STREAK

Have you ever experienced a losing streak in life that seemed to be a message from the universe that success and happiness are not for you? If so, I can help.

It's easy to get stuck in negative thinking when events in your life keep going wrong. You might come to believe the universe is conspiring against you (it's not.). That alone is certain to translate into less happiness and success. So what do you do?

I recommend the following reframe, which I have used all my adult life.

Usual Frame: The universe is acting against me.

Reframe: The universe owes me.

If you flip a coin and it comes up heads ten times in a row, the universe owes you some tails. And if everything we know about physics and statistics is true, you will eventually end up with the same number of heads and tails if you keep going.

People are not coins, but the general idea is that one person cannot be continuously lucky or unlucky for an extended period. That isn't a thing. Bad luck can certainly arrive in clusters, but like the coin flips, the odds must revert to something normal over time, and that means the universe might owe you some good luck.

The strange thing about feeling lucky or unlucky is that your experience so often matches your expectations. Yesterday, as an experiment, I started repeating to myself and people I encountered that "everything is going my way today." And sure enough, my day turned out to be spectacular. Did I create my own good luck that day, or did I adjust my filter so I noticed the good and ignored the bad? Or was it pure chance?

I have no idea. All I know is that acting as if you expect good luck *seems* to produce more of it, whether you are writing affirmations, praying to a God, or simply using the power of positive thinking.

If acting as if luck is coming your way doesn't produce any luck for you for a few weeks in a row, should you discontinue being positive? No. Your loved ones probably noticed the change and liked it, as did your coworkers, boss, and everyone else you encountered. And it probably helped keep you in better spirits than if you expected doom. In other words, this is a "can't lose" reframe. Your payoff will either be good or great, and it might be either real or imagined, but none of the outcomes are bad.

This reframe is extra powerful for those of us who had suboptimal childhoods or a bad adult life so far. The feeling that the universe owes you some luck will be strongest when you feel the most wronged.

Don't make the mistake of sitting on the couch waiting for luck to hunt you down. Luck needs you to do your part, and that generally looks like this:

- Work on your fitness and health.
- Build your talent stack.
- Meet more people.
- Go where there is more energy.
- Create systems for your success.

If you follow that recipe all your life and keep telling yourself the universe owes you some luck, I like your odds.

Few things are more important to our happiness and success than pure luck. Luck is real in the sense that some people win lotteries and others do not, and some are born smart and attractive while others are not. But if you think luck is something that you cannot control, you are wrong. You can control the heck out of luck. I do it all the time. It involves moving from a place in which luck can't find you to a place where it can.

I've written this book while hoping—as authors do—that it performs well in the marketplace. Luck will play a large role because it might only take one major book review or recommendation to light the fuse on it. Or maybe events in the world will line up to make this content more appealing through no effort of my own. But there is one thing I know for sure: NOT writing a book gives me a smaller chance of luck finding me.

The first rule of luck is that you need to "do something" to have a chance of luck noticing you. Closely related to that rule is the recommendation that you go where the energy is highest, i.e., a densely populated place rather than a rural area. You want commerce and life in general to be bustling around you. That gives you your highest odds of something lucky happening. Likewise, joining the fastest-growing industry that will hire you probably creates more opportunity for luck than a mature business. Follow the energy to the places in which luck can more easily find you.

Usual Frame: Luck is random and can't be managed.

Reframe: You can go where there is more luck (more energy).

Some of us have a hard time dealing with our own bad luck. "Why me???" you ask. If you think the universe targeted you unfairly, that adds psychological pain on top of whatever else is bugging you. So I use the following reframe to avoid the "why me?" problem.

Usual Frame: I am unusually unlucky this happened to me.

Reframe: Everyone has problems. No exceptions.

We humans can be petty and jealous and vengeful and small. That's probably why it can make you feel better to know others have big problems, too. No one gets through life without their share. The reason this reframe works is probably related to the fact that you don't mind working as much when you know everyone else is. But if you think you are working while others play, you will hate life. So take some comfort that your problems—no matter how big—might be no bigger than other people's issues you haven't yet heard about.

FAIRNESS

The concept of fairness is useful in sports, relationships, and other situations, but it is a big obstacle to success. This takes some explaining because we are wired from birth to recognize and prefer fairness. For example, if you have siblings, you probably tried the "fairness" argument with your parents to make sure you got an equal or better portion of whatever generosity was being dispensed. As a kid, I tried that approach

exactly three times. Each time, my mother check-mated me with this reframe.

Usual Frame: Things should be fair. (me)

Reframe: Life isn't fair. (Mom)

At or around the third time you hear "Life isn't fair," from a parent, you realize you will never come up with a good enough argument to break it. Could I argue that life was fair? No. Was there some law requiring fairness in this situation? No. Did the Constitution demand it? Sorry. Did the Ten Commandments address it? Probably not.

"Life isn't fair" is a debate-ending reframe. I used this reframe in my limited step-parenting experiences to good effect. I often added that fairness is not measured in units of one day. One must look at a multi-year period to know if something such as fairness was approached. It's hard to debate an unknown future from the perspective of right now. That's why it ends the debate.

I once explained the "life isn't fair" reframe to my stepson this way: If your first impression is that it means you will get less stuff, you are missing the bigger picture. The existence of so-called unfairness means you can (usually) find situations in which the unfairness is in your favor. Be strategic. Go where you have an "unfair" advantage. And if you can't find an existing natural advantage, create one by assembling a stack of talents that make you both rare and commercially valuable. Or move to someplace that doesn't already have enough people who do whatever you do.

Usual Frame: Fairness is a desirable social goal.

Reframe: Fairness is the enemy of success.

The free market rewards people who solve the biggest problems, to paraphrase Elon Musk. If you solve the world's biggest problem, you won't want to be paid the same as your neighbor who has a perfectly respectable job in the cubicle economy. That would not seem fair to you, and it would probably prevent you from trying to solve any big problems that require grueling work and great risk. The existence of unfairness is what drives the entire economy. Once you embrace that truth, it will be easier to find your own little island of advantage and exploit it.

CREATIVITY

An odd feature of my career is that people quote me a lot. Do a Google search for "Scott Adams quotes" and a flurry of them pop up. The most viral of my quotes—by far—is this one from my book *The Dilbert Principle*, published in 1996:

> **Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.**

That's a reframe, but it takes a bit of explaining. The first half of the reframe gives you permission to imagine the broadest set of ideas because you are intentionally inviting the ones that have "mistakes" in them. But art is not about the expected. Art lives in the so-called mistakes, the imperfections. For example, my comic character *Dilbert* has no mouth. That's a "mistake," but for some reason, it works. And so it becomes art.

Usual Frame: Avoid mistakes in your art.

Reframe: Invite mistakes into your art and keep the "good ones."

The way I experience creativity is as a river of ideas flowing through my consciousness. Nearly all of them are bad or incomplete ideas, and my brain flushes them as quickly as they arrive. But every now and then, I get a physical sensation from an idea. It might cause me to laugh, get goosebumps, or get excited about a project. That's the good one.

To put it another way, I don't "create" ideas, I simply select the best from the stream as it passes. And I identify the good ones by how they make me feel. I ignore the ideas that have intellectual appeal but don't register in my body.

Your brain doesn't have the ability to stop thinking. That means you don't need to summon ideas; you only need to tell your brain what problem you are trying to solve, then watch the ideas flow past. Pick the best ones based on how they make your body feel.

My creative process depends as much on releasing the bad ideas as it does on identifying the good ones. Releasing bad ideas is harder than it sounds. We tend to fall in love with our ideas, and they become sticky. The best way to delete a sticky-but-bad idea is reminding yourself that the active part of the creation process is releasing the bad ideas. And if you don't

"feel" the idea—literally feel in some part of your body—it's not worth saving. This reframe helps you do that.

Usual Frame: I need to come up with a good idea.

Reframe: I need to release all my bad ideas as quickly as possible.

I won't pretend creativity is something anyone can do if they use the right technique. Creativity, like most human skills, is a genetic gift. Most humans have some degree of it. What these two reframes do is give you an active way to brainstorm. Instead of trying to summon ideas, you scan a huge number of bad ones—focusing on speed more than analysis—until one of the ideas moves you physically.

IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

I HAVE A BAD CASE OF IMPOSTOR SYNDROME.
I FEEL AS IF I'M ONLY PRETENDING TO BE A GOOD MANAGER, AND SOMEDAY EVERYONE WILL FIND OUT IT'S AN ACT.
IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, WE FIGURED THAT OUT A WHILE AGO.
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Starting a new job can be tough on your ego. You won't understand the company-specific jargon for weeks. You won't know who to ask for help. And you won't want to continuously ask questions of the one person who might have all the answers. In that situation, it's normal to feel as if you are the only incompetent person in the company. And that feeling can last.

The way to upgrade that experience is to change your frame of comparison. Don't compare yourself to seasoned employees with years of experience. Compare yourself to where you were yesterday or to when you started. Focus on what you have learned already and how quickly you learned it. As you watch the imaginary pile of "what you learned" grow in your mind, your confidence will come back online.

Usual Frame: You feel like a fraud. Everyone else is competent.

Reframe: You are learning fast. Look at all you learned!

To be fair, I can't rule out the possibility that you feel like an impostor because you are bad at your job and always will be. But if you have read this far, I suspect you have some skills or will soon.

I would also like to offer you a helpful observation from my decades of experience in the business and entertainment worlds: ***Everyone is faking it (at least some of the time).*** Thanks to my odd career, I've spent a lot of time with experts of all kinds: scientists, CEOs, entrepreneurs, billionaires, doctors, lawyers, you name it. And they all have human biases and knowledge gaps. If you don't believe me, go to any expert with a problem that isn't like the normal ones. You'll lose all faith in humanity, but at least you won't feel you are the only "impostor" in the game. Everyone in a new job is an impostor, and every experienced person encountering a novel situation is an impostor, too. You are in good company.

If you can't shake the sensation that you are an impostor at work, it might make you feel better to know how successful you can be with that mindset. I felt like an impostor at every job I've ever had, and I wasn't wrong. Behold the following experiences:

In my banking career, I was offered a job as a computer programmer and accepted. I did not know how to program anything. I signed up for classes at night and figured it out.

In my phone company career, I was promoted to the job of engineer despite having a degree in economics. I muddled through with the help of coworkers who were capable.

I was offered a contract to be a syndicated cartoonist before I had ever created a commercial-grade comic. With the help of the syndication company, I figured it out.

I was offered a book contract despite having zero professional writing experience outside of comic strips. That book, *The Dilbert Principle*, became the #1 bestselling nonfiction book in the country.

I was offered professional speaking opportunities despite having only some corporate presentation experience. My first outing was a disaster. I improved steadily and became one of the highest-paid speakers in the country.

If you saw the beginning of my livestreaming career that started on a buggy app called Periscope and branched out to YouTube and the Locals platform, you know how low-quality it was. I experimented for years to get the show, *Coffee with Scott Adams*, to the level it is today. (Still low production quality, but much better than where it started.)

You can see from the examples that being relatively incompetent—certainly at first—had surprisingly little impact on where things ended up. What mattered more were the skills I was amassing while struggling on each of those new adventures. If you feel you are taking on a bit more than you can handle, that's probably the perfect place to be. You can generally do more than you believe you can, so staying in the "impostor zone" while you build your skills is necessary for success.

If you discover a reframe that makes you feel less of an impostor—in this book or anywhere else—go ahead and use it. If that doesn't work, try the other side of the sandwich and reframe everyone else as impostors. You won't care so much about being an impostor when you realize you're surrounded by them.

Usual Frame: I feel like an impostor at my job.

Reframe: Everyone is an impostor.

I use this reframe a lot. I think it's easier to embrace the idea that everyone is an impostor as you get older, after you have watched countless experts and leaders unwittingly reveal their impostor sides.

DOPAMINE FAUCET

You probably know dopamine is a chemical in your body associated with making you feel good. But you might not know it's essential to making you physically move. If you wanted to move but had low dopamine, you would just sit there wanting to get up but not moving. I'm oversimplifying, but that's the basic idea.

Another way to look at dopamine is that it is the "currency" your body uses to transact business. You want your body to go do some work? You'd better have enough dopamine to pay for it.

The dopamine frame is more than just interesting. It is also a prescription for what to do if you find yourself low on motivation, energy, or enjoyment of life: Go get yourself some dopamine.

As luck would have it, you are alive in an age in which we know how humans create dopamine. Apparently, we evolved to reward ourselves with a hit of dopamine when we complete meaningful tasks. And those tasks could be anything from cleaning the house to taking a class to improving

your career options. When you recognize your own small successes, your brain releases dopamine to reward you. That dopamine can propel you to greater success by keeping you interested and energetic toward your long-term desires.

You've probably heard it said that success leads to success. That's true for a variety of reasons, one of which is dopamine production.

When I first entered the cartooning business, I kept my corporate day job for years. That meant waking at 4:00 AM seven days per week to do the comic, working all day during the workweek, and working again at night when I got home. As hard as all that sounds—and it was plenty hard—it was easier than you might think because of the dopamine feedback loop. Every day without exception, I produced a comic that would run in newspapers around the country. It was a task with a start and a finish, per comic, and the satisfaction each day was wonderful. By the time I arrived at my day job, I was high on dopamine. Compare that to corporate projects that have no end, drag on forever, and get canceled in the next reorganization. The corporate world doesn't offer much in the way of completed tasks that boost dopamine.

According to Dr. Andrew Huberman, you can hack your dopamine reward system by reframing your work today as essential to the kind of future you want. That gives you a reason to be happy every day. I call it preferring systems over goals. If you are following a good system, the reward is that you followed the system.

My best example of systems over goals is my gym-going habit. About five times a year, the following scenario plays out: I put on my workout clothes, drive across town to my gym, realize I don't have it in me that day, then head home without exercising. But I declare success because I focused on the system, and that gives me a dopamine hit for successfully maintaining a useful habit.

Usual Frame: Your mood is determined by your internal thoughts.

Reframe: You can improve your mood by completing meaningful tasks.

MANAGING VERSUS REACTING

By managing, I mean managing any part of your life, from fitness to income to employees if you have them. It can be an illusion that you are managing things when you are making decisions (even smart ones!) in any situation in which you have no way to measure what is working and what is not. That isn't managing. That's guessing plus wishful thinking.

Usual Frame: Whatever managers do is managing.

Reframe: If you are not measuring, you are not managing.

In the workplace, you might be measuring profits or expenses to see how they change based on your decisions. Businesses measure everything they can measure because that gives them the most leverage over their situations. You should do the same in your personal life.

Are you trying to maintain or lose weight? Weigh yourself every day at the same time. (Ignore the "experts" who tell you otherwise. If you aren't measuring, you are not managing anything.)

Are you trying to get more fit? Count the number of times you make it to the gym each week.

Are you trying to meet more people? How many times did you "put yourself out there" this week?

If you can measure it, you have a chance of managing it. To be fair, you also must make lots of decisions without the benefit of measurement. That's okay so long as you are measuring the big stuff.

ART

One of the gripes I most often hear from my critics is that the *Dilbert* comic is "not funny." I don't know how they explain the tens of millions of loyal readers who have purchased my books and calendars and laughed out loud when they read them. My explanation is that art is subjective. The only objective measure of art is commercial appeal. If people want to pay for it, that's good art. Everything else is just opinion.

I'm not a fan of opera, but I observe that people buy tickets to experience it, so obviously the opera-makers are doing something right. I don't judge opera beyond observing that some people like it. And that's what I

recommend for you. Stop judging art as good or bad. Simply observe whether people like it and let that be your guide to its quality.

Usual Frame: Some art is good, and some is bad.

Reframe: If there is a market for the art, it is good art.

HOW TO SPOT A WINNER

If you create a new product or perhaps some type of art, you might want to ask others for their opinion to see how much potential it has. If the people you ask have glowing praise for your creation, that might make you feel good. But in my experience, friends and family are liars—they care more about supporting you than making accurate predictions.

The most reliable way to spot a future winner is when people volunteer to extend or modify your product on their own. For example, if you wrote a clever blog post for your industry but someone in another industry copied and modified it for their own use, you probably have commercial-grade writing skills. That's how I learned I could be a writer and cartoonist for a living. Long before I monetized those skills, my coworkers were taking my corporate slide decks with my earliest comics and faxing them around the company. (Yes, it was pre-email.) And when *Dilbert* came out as a comic strip, people were cutting them out of newspapers and organizing them by topic into their own binder-books. That's how I knew *Dilbert* would be big, long before it was: People proved it by their actions, not their words. Something about that little comic made people *move*. Here's the reframe.

Usual Frame: Praise for your creation predicts you have a hit.

Reframe: Only action predicts a hit, not words. Watch for people to extend or modify your creation.

The Bad Version

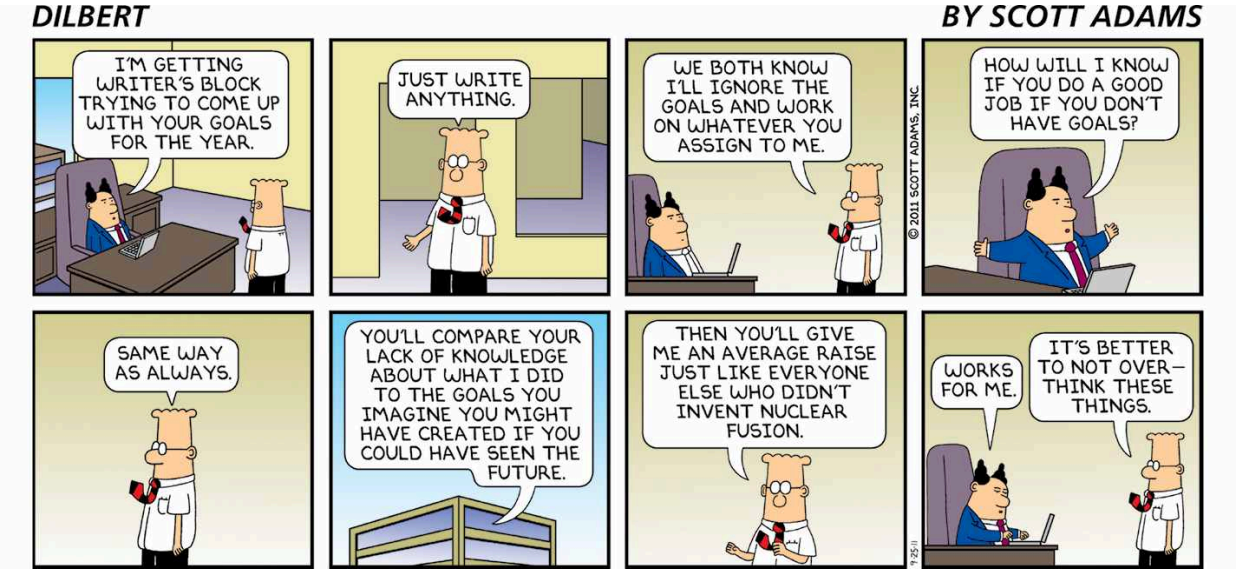
Another strong indicator of future success is a product that is terrible yet popular as soon as it is released. Mobile phones, the Internet, and fax machines all followed that path. Each one was a user nightmare in its early form, yet people craved those experiences so much that the early versions' low quality did not predict where they would end up.

In the artistic world, the first season of *The Simpsons* had low production values. Yet its popularity allowed it to evolve into one of the most well-constructed shows of all time. The first episodes of *Seinfeld* were similarly awful, but something about the show brought people back, which gave the creators time to develop a TV masterpiece.

To spot a future winning product, look for the bad version to be almost irrationally popular—and for consumers to be extending or modifying the product for new uses.

People often ask me to predict the future of Bitcoin. I don't make financial recommendations, but I do own a small amount of Bitcoin because although the user interface is a masochist's delight, a global fan base has rallied around Bitcoin. And every day, people are finding new ways to use it. Perhaps Bitcoin already had its big run, but that big run was predicted early on. You would have made money betting on my two rules for spotting a winner.

WRITER'S BLOCK


DILBERT
BY SCOTT ADAMS
I'M GETTING WRITER'S BLOCK TRYING TO COME UP WITH YOUR GOALS FOR THE YEAR.
JUST WRITE ANYTHING.
WE BOTH KNOW I'LL IGNORE THE GOALS AND WORK ON WHATEVER YOU ASSIGN TO ME.
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HOW WILL I KNOW IF YOU DO A GOOD JOB IF YOU DON'T HAVE GOALS?
SAME WAY AS ALWAYS.
YOU'LL COMPARE YOUR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHAT I DID TO THE GOALS YOU IMAGINE YOU MIGHT HAVE CREATED IF YOU COULD HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE.
THEN YOU'LL GIVE ME AN AVERAGE RAISE JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE WHO DIDN'T INVENT NUCLEAR FUSION.
WORKS FOR ME.
IT'S BETTER TO NOT OVER-THINK THESE THINGS.

My job these days involves writing at least one commercial-grade comic strip per day, writing several pages for a book per day, and creating a live one-person show on the Internet every day. Sometimes I film a micro lesson on some topic of interest for my Locals subscribers. That's a lot of creating. I can do all of that because I don't have the thing you might call writer's block. But to be clear, I didn't overcome writer's block; I reframed it out of my existence. My reframes for writers will not turn an uncreative person into a creative one, but I can unleash whatever creative potential you have with a few reframes that have benefited my career. Here's the first one.

Usual Frame: I can't think of anything to write.

Reframe 1: I'm in the wrong environment for writing.

If I were sitting on my couch trying to write this chapter, I would be shooting blanks. My cute dog would be pestering me, my refrigerator would be whistling my name, and I can usually depend on some major electrical, plumbing, or other disaster to pop up when I am within the same zip code as my house. If I were less experienced as a writer, I would be cursing my writer's block.

But it wouldn't be writer's block at all. It would be a case of the wrong setting. I am now writing as quickly as I can type while sitting in the snack bar of my health club. I am surrounded by noisy toddlers, chatty diners, a TV, and every manner of gym noise and distraction, also known as "perfect for writing." Weird, right? Seems the opposite of common sense, but science and experience confirm that the best environments for writing are where you can actively ignore the people around you. Later today I will go to Starbucks because it is busy and noisy. I will choose the busiest and noisiest Starbucks location from a choice of four near my home. The writing will come easily, even with decaf.

I once wrote an entire book in a restaurant booth during the busy meal periods. (I owned the restaurant so they couldn't kick me out.) Not only was it easy to write the book, but it was also enjoyable. The environment was so perfect for writing, work became play.

I can't guarantee that writing in public places will be better for everyone, but I strongly recommend experimenting to see if it works for you. If not, keep searching until you find a physical environment that does work for you.

In a similar vein, you also need to find the time of day when your brain is naturally creative. For me, that time is 4:00-10:00 AM, which is not unusual

for writers. We tend to write best after midnight and before noon. Earlier in the book, I discussed the reframe of managing your energy, not your time. Writing is the best use of that reframe. If you are trying to write when your energy is not matched to the task, you're begging for writer's block. Here's a reframe that calls it out.

Usual Frame: I have writer's block.

Reframe 2: I'm trying to write at the wrong time of day.

Writing Something Bad

Let's say you found a good place to write, and it's the right time of day for your creative juices to flow. If you can't think of anything good to write, never leave the page blank. The better alternative is to create something bad and see if you can fix it. And if you can't fix it, maybe another idea will hit you while you try because life rewards action. The only bad writing is no writing at all. Everything else is either good or under-edited. And editing is easier than writing, so putting something on a page moves you to an easier phase of work. That's why you do it.

Usual Frame: I can't think of anything good to write.

Reframe 3: I can write something bad and fix it.

I am modeling that technique as I write this paragraph. Below the sentence I am writing are three bullet points you won't see by the time this book is published. Each bullet point makes a point that I think is likely to have a place in this chapter. The next step will be to delete the weakest points, put them in order, and write the top one as a full sentence. Next, I apply these filters to my new sentence:

Is It a Direct Sentence?

It is better to say the boy hit the ball than the ball was hit by the boy. Brains process direct sentences faster. Tell me who is doing the thing before telling me the thing.

Too Many Adjectives?

Don't say it was very hot. Say it was hot. Neither sentence is specific, but one uses too many words. Brains like fewer words.

Nuke the Adverbs

There might never be a right time to use an adverb.

Write at a Sixth-Grade Level

For most kinds of writing—from humor to business—the best sentence is the simplest one that gets the message across. If you use words that a twelve-year-old would understand, you will sound like the smartest person in the conversation. As a bonus, your ideas will stand out more since they're not buried in word debris. Simple sentences are better in every way. They are more persuasive, easier to remember, and easier for others to consume. Don't fall into the trap of mistaking long sentences and brainy jargon for genius-level insight. Save that nonsense for dating a librarian.

Here is the sentence stub I mentioned earlier that expanded to the paragraph above:

Bullet point: *Simpler is better for writing.*

How to Get Those Bullet Points

If you have no ideas worthy of becoming bullet points and want to generate some, I don't recommend sitting in front of a blank page. That's a form of torture. Most of my writing happens when I am taking a walk, folding laundry, getting in the shower, or enjoying the luxury of my Man Cave (my garage). These are all part of the writing process, and science backs me on this. It isn't a coincidence that your best ideas pop into your head when you are doing something mindless and pleasant.

Funny Words

If you are trying to make your writing style interesting or humorous, add a funny word substitution. All you do is look at your completed sentence and ask yourself what word substitution would sound funnier.

For example, if your sentence said you took a quick detour to avoid trouble, you might instead say you "scampered away" or "took a hasty detour" to add some energy to the sentence. Look at every word in your sentence and ask yourself what word means the same as what you have on the page but sounds funny or adds flavor or energy. Words that have embedded intentions are often the funniest. That's why the word *yank* is funnier than the word *pull*. Yank implies some anger or frustration. Pull is just a functional word. Language is full of lively, attitude-driven words you can use instead of dead words. Here are a few examples:

Did you ***leave*** the room, or did you ***flee***?

Did you ***eat*** french fries or did you ***inhale*** them?

Did the customer act ***unusual*** or ***squirrely***?

For humor writing, you can saturate your sentences with interesting words. For business or professional writing, you might want to use one interesting word in an entire document. It will be noticed. In a good way. For example, in the section above that talks about writing like a sixth grader, I used the word "debris" as my interesting word. One interesting word is all that section needed because I was gunning for comprehension over humor.

> *Pssst*: *Gunning* was my interesting word in that last paragraph. Did you notice it?

Find the interesting word in this comic.

CONGRESS SUBPOENAED OUR CEO TO TESTIFY ABOUT THE DANGER OF OUR PRODUCTS.
I WANT YOU TO PREPARE HIM.
TO GET THE FACTS RIGHT?
I WAS THINKING MORE ALONG THE LINES OF FLEEING JUSTICE.
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8-4-22

Use your Body as a Sensor

Good writing makes the reader feel something. This is especially true for humor. That's why I use my body as a sensor to know when I wrote something funny or emotionally persuasive. When I use my intellect to guide my writing, I write like a soulless professor. But when I let my entire body experience the words as I juggle them in my mind, I can use my physical response to pick the ones with the best kick.

For example, I often write a joke that my intellect tells me hits all the notes to be a proper joke, but my body has no reaction. I don't laugh, twitch, snort, or react in any way. I delete that joke. Other times I write something that makes no logical sense, but it makes me giggle no matter how many times I reread it. That's a keeper. My body is a better sensor than my brain when I'm writing for emotional impact. If you don't feel it, you are not done.

Strangle Your Babies

It’s easy to fall in love with your own sentences. They are like your babies. But if you are not willing to strangle a boatload of your own babies to create a paragraph, you are not yet a writer. The first fifty-thousand babies you strangle will be hard on your brain. But you get used to it. Be aware of this obstacle to good writing and remind yourself to be brutal to your babies. Sometimes you work on a sentence for an hour and delete it. That’s writing. You’re doing it correctly.

Writing as a System

If you see writing as a process of conjuring up beautiful sentences out of thin air and writing them down, you are likely to experience a lot of so-called writer's block. But if you use the method I described, you will be getting something on the page right away and improving it from there. When I say I reframed writer's block out of my life, I mean I can always write a *bad* sentence. And once written, that bad sentence moves me into editing mode, which is already progress. As I fix my most recent sentence, I am likely to have thoughts about related points. I immediately stop and capture those related thoughts in bullet points at the bottom of my working page. Maybe I use those thoughts later, maybe not. But writing them down gets them out of my head so I can get back to my sentence.

And that's how you beat writer's block—you reframe it out of existence.

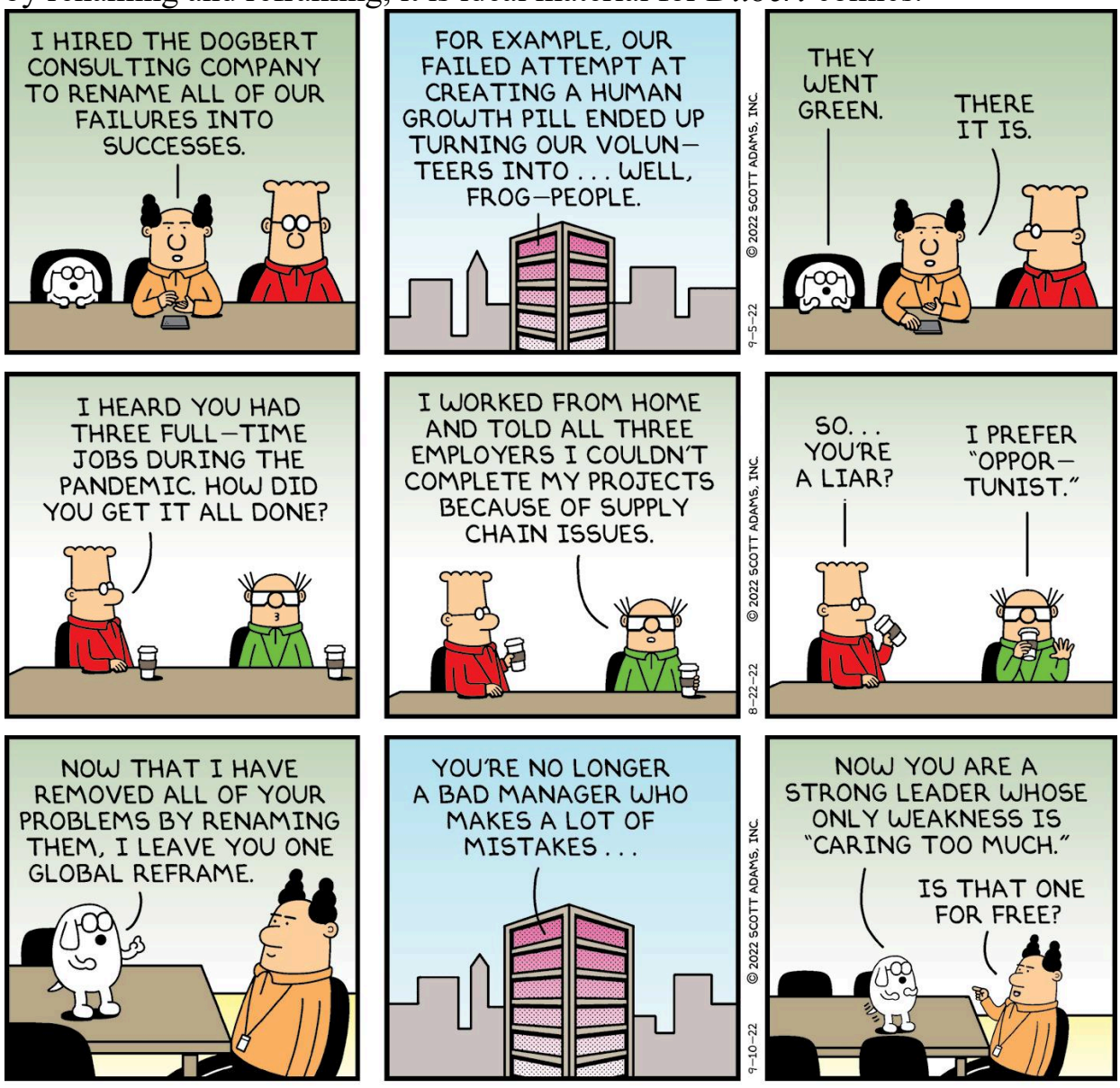
REFRAMES IN BUSINESS (THE BAD KIND)

I can't talk about reframes for success without addressing the way people in the business world abuse language in the pursuit of sounding smart, disguising bad intentions, and covering up their mistakes—that sort of thing.

Sometimes the renaming happens in the context of brand management or marketing in general. Other times it happens in the context of bureaucratic weaselness. Everyone wants their job title to sound impressive. And everyone wants their project name to give off a vibe that anyone associated with such a thing should be promoted.

But none of that is the type of reframing I discuss in this book. When you use a reframe on yourself, you are both the therapist and the willing patient. That is an ethical situation. When a company renames a product or service, that can be more like a con artist preying on an unwilling mark. You didn't agree to be influenced by their wordplay persuasion, but they might impose it on you anyway. That isn't illegal, of course, but you can make up your own mind about the ethics of it. I would say it depends on the specifics. I don't mind when a company with a good product goes out of its way to make me like it. But if the renaming and reframing is intended to deceive, that's another matter.

You will not be surprised to learn that when companies attempt to deceive by renaming and reframing, it is ideal material for *Dilbert* comics.


I HIRED THE DOGBERT CONSULTING COMPANY TO RENAME ALL OF OUR FAILURES INTO SUCCESSES.
FOR EXAMPLE, OUR FAILED ATTEMPT AT CREATING A HUMAN GROWTH PILL ENDED UP TURNING OUR VOLUN-TEERS INTO . . . WELL, FROG-PEOPLE.
THEY WENT GREEN.
THERE IT IS.
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9-5-22
I HEARD YOU HAD THREE FULL-TIME JOBS DURING THE PANDEMIC. HOW DID YOU GET IT ALL DONE?
I WORKED FROM HOME AND TOLD ALL THREE EMPLOYERS I COULDN'T COMPLETE MY PROJECTS BECAUSE OF SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES.
SO. . . YOU'RE A LIAR?
I PREFER "OPPOR-TUNIST."
© 2022 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
8-22-22
NOW THAT I HAVE REMOVED ALL OF YOUR PROBLEMS BY RENAMING THEM, I LEAVE YOU ONE GLOBAL REFRAME.
YOU'RE NO LONGER A BAD MANAGER WHO MAKES A LOT OF MISTAKES . . .
NOW YOU ARE A STRONG LEADER WHOSE ONLY WEAKNESS IS "CARING TOO MUCH."
IS THAT ONE FOR FREE?
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9-10-22

CHAPTER 3

Mental Health Reframes

As I often say, you don't want to get medical or financial advice from cartoonists. With that in mind, and with uncharacteristic humility, I present reframes in the mental health domain that people tell me have worked for them, some that work for me, and some that have potential. It isn't science. But it also isn't dangerous. Let's jump in.

KNOWING WHO YOU ARE

I often hear people say they are trying to figure out "who they are," whatever that means. If it helps, I can think of at least four potential ways to describe who you are.

Are you …

1. Your inner thoughts?
2. Your preferences?
3. Your history?
4. Your current actions?

I suspect most people think of themselves as being inseparable from their secret thoughts. If you privately harbor negative or positive feelings about something in the world, you think that's who you are. And that's unfortunate because your secret inner thoughts are probably mostly terrible. Why would you want to be terrible? You have options. This reframe reveals them.

Usual Frame: I am my inner thoughts.

Reframe: I am what I do.

Sometimes you hear people talk about finding themselves, staying true to themselves, and otherwise finding some magic core "self" that needs to be respected and protected. You don't have a core self. You are what you make

of this life, meaning the sum of your actions. Another way to reframe this way of thinking goes like this.

Usual Frame: Find yourself.

Reframe: Author yourself.

You are a blank canvas. You get to paint your life by changing your actions. If you want to become a kind person, do kind acts. If you want to be capable and successful, build a talent stack, and so on. If you see yourself as the ball that is batted around by life, that's how things will play out. But if you take authorship and design systems for improving yourself in key areas, you can carve your name on reality in ways you probably never imagined possible.

Judging People

You might think that privately judging people doesn't hurt anyone. We humans judge reflexively; it's simply something that happens in our heads. Maybe you even share your judginess with a friend. No big deal, right?

Well, there is a downside. The frame you use to judge others is likely to be the frame in which you come to see yourself, and worse, the way you imagine others see you. That can rot you from the inside. Ask any teenager. They live and die based on what they imagine others are thinking of them.

The best way to talk yourself out of feeling judged by others is to stop judging others. Lose that frame. When you judge others on a subjective scale of goodness and badness, you are buying into your own destruction. The more you think of others as good and bad, the more you will suspect people are judging you because that will become your go-to frame. Once it becomes how you think of others, you will become obsessed with how they are judging you. It's unavoidable. And toxic.

To be clear, others ARE judging you. You are not imagining it. What I am suggesting is that their judgment about you isn't important (even to them) and won't affect you if you never buy into their frame in the first place.

You're probably good at some things. The person judging you is probably good at some things, too. If you take it further, you are inviting unnecessary pain into your life.

Usual Frame: Some people are good, and some are not.

Reframe: We're all flawed, and we're all good at different things.

A healthy habit for staying out of the judging mindset involves gratitude. Appreciate the skills and qualities of the people you find the most annoying. There's a person in my extended social world that I dislike and for good reason. But I must admit he's excellent at his job.

Every time you judge someone harshly, you buy into the idea that judging is a thing worth doing. It isn't. Stop judging others so much and watch how much less you worry about being judged.

The Danger of Art

People who view art as entertainment often make the tragic mistake of accidentally injecting themselves with sadness medicine. And by that, I mean they consume anxiety-inducing movies, books, and music about loss and tragedy to make themselves feel good. That makes perfect sense to anyone who sees art as entertainment. What do you do when you feel blue? One good idea is to find some entertainment. How about rewatching the movie *Schindler's List*? That's entertainment, isn't it?

No, it isn't. It's more like a drug that gives you PTSD for the rest of your life. If the message of it keeps the world safer, I'm in favor of it. I just wish it had a proper warning label. I think Spielberg should have paid me to be a test animal for his mind-altering product. Here's the reframe of this.

Usual Frame: Art is entertainment.

Reframe: Art is a powerful, mind-altering drug.

I recommend removing from your life all art that makes you sad or anxious, even if it redeems itself with some sort of happy ending. Find art that moves you without the bad parts. There is plenty of it.

Handling Criticism

As a public figure who is reckless enough to use social media, I am viciously criticized many times a day. A few times per year, I wake to see my name trending on X. That is rarely a good thing. It usually means the trolls have already begun their assault on my timeline. And yet I generally have a good day. Do you think you could handle a daily hellscape of insults about your work, your character, your mind, and your appearance? After reading this chapter, it will be a lot easier. I'll start with my favorite reframe for critics.

Usual Frame: Your critics are evil monsters.

Reframe: Your critics are your mascots.

Years ago, when I co-owned a local restaurant, one of the employees decided to do a one-person picket line in front of our entrance every day during peak meal periods. I forget what his complaint was, but no one else on the staff seemed to have a problem except for their complaints about the picketer, as they believed he was driving away their future tips. Tensions were high between the staff and my co-owner, Stacey. At first, I advised them to wait it out, assuming the disgruntled worker would get tired of it after a few days. But he was feisty. He leaned into it, day after day.

One day I stopped in and watched the show. It was comical because we didn't regard his complaint as valid (whatever it was), and he was all alone putting on a show. So I decided to reframe him. I turned to Stacey and told her I liked her new mascot. She laughed. I laughed. She shared it with the servers and kitchen staff. They laughed.

And just like that, our biggest critic became our mascot. We weren't mocking him so much as reframing our experience. We could let him bother us. or we could let him be our mascot, which we all agreed was sort of hilarious. It was an easy choice. A few days later, he gave up.

I've had success reframing several of my most energetic critics and trolls as my mascots. I have no idea what impact that has on the critics or if they even know it happened. All I know is that the moment I mentally reframe a critic as a mascot, I feel better. Sometimes I even feel great.

Reframing How Criticism Feels

A good way to take energy out of any criticism that is using your self-esteem as a speed bag is by imagining the situation in its most basic scientific form. Particles and chemistry. Physics. Things bumping into other things. Most of that interaction is happening outside your zone of giving-a-darn. The random electric signals in the brain of another person need not be your concern.

Usual Frame: Criticism feels like a dagger to your heart.

Reframe: Criticism is a chemical reaction in the skull of someone who isn't in the room.

Criticism stings. No one is immune. But reframing criticism as tiny changes in the wet and foldy brain of some walking-and-talking clump of carbon doesn't feel so much like it is your problem.

The Go Eat Fudge Philosophy

This is the family-friendly version of a philosophy I heard as a young man. You can substitute naughtier words for "Go eat fudge," and it will work just as well if not better. This reframe is NOT meant to be spoken aloud.

Notice how the reframe feels.

Usual Frame: You should do what I think you should do.

Reframe: Go eat fudge. (Spoken only in your mind.)

I learned this reframe in my freshman year of college, and it has served me well. Every time someone tried to control me with their opinion of what I should or should not be doing with my life, I dismissed them with one mental thought: Go eat fudge. (I might have substituted spicier words.)

This might be the best example of how reframes can be useful while also being nonsense. The three-word mental dismissal doesn't seem as if it would be helpful, but I can report that it was. Not only for me, but for several of my college friends who tried it.

The essence of the reframe is that other people are not the authors of your experience. Sometimes you need to work with people you don't like, and in that case, you will have to fake it as best you can. But for everyone else, they can go eat fudge. Not your problem.

Movie Reframe

Here's a reframe I heard the other day. I tried it, and it worked right away.

Usual Frame: Everyone is thinking about me.

Reframe: You are only a bit player in their movie.

Outside of your immediate friends and loved ones, how much do you think about the imperfections of other people? Probably not much. You notice them sometimes, but they do not stick in your mind. It's the same way they think of you—most of the time, they don't care.

Our egos cause us to think everything we do is important. It isn't. And that means your friends and loved ones will understand when you mess up. The rest of the world will never care one way or another.

The next time you feel like you're being watched, or people are just waiting for you to make a mistake, remember how rarely people care about anyone but themselves. It's weirdly comforting.

Social Media

When I was a young man, life would sometimes be stressful, but at least I could relax between the stressful situations and recharge. Today when I am between stressful situations, I take out my phone and browse social media —which makes me angrier and more anxious. Maybe later I turn on a movie and watch dozens of people getting slain for my entertainment. This is not relaxing.

I use social media because it is an essential element of my job. That might be the case for you, too. But for most people, social media is an addiction. They come for the dopamine hits, and if that has some long-term detrimental impact, it isn't obvious enough or big enough to stop the addiction. The immediate concern is getting the next hit of dopamine. Addicts learn to think short term.

If I tell you something is a form of entertainment, you will have a natural attraction to it because we like to be entertained. But if I label that same situation as *addiction*, no one wants an addiction. And that helps you break the habit.

Usual Frame: Social media is a form of entertainment.

Reframe: Social media is an addiction.

You're not entertained; you're addicted. Once you accept that frame, you have a chance of breaking free. I should note that social media "addiction" is not equivalent to drug, alcohol, or cigarette addiction. Substance addictions will not budge with reframes because addiction is outside mental control. Breaking a bad habit is easier. Social media is more like a bad habit than an addiction, but reframing it as an addiction is the stronger play for reprogramming your brain. You don't care so much about breaking a bad habit as breaking an addiction. Addiction just feels worse. Use that to your advantage.

Internet Insults

Every day on social media, trolls and critics attack me over my appearance, age, intelligence, personal life, character, and talent. I've become an accidental expert on how to reframe deep insults into my own entertainment, and I recently came upon a reframe that helps a lot.

Usual Frame: An insult is damaging to my mental health.

Reframe: An insult is a *confession* that your accuser can't refute your opinion and/or has personal problems of some sort.

This reframe won't fit every situation, but people who enjoy good mental health are not spending much time insulting people on social media or anywhere else. Likewise, when people have a strong argument, they stick with facts. You only get triggered to insult someone when your argument has been dismantled and you feel the need to act out.

On X, I use the reframe this way:

Critic: "Of course you have that opinion, Dilweed, it's because you are uninformed and stupid."

Me: "I appreciate your confession."

Then I excuse myself from the conversation without explaining what I mean by "confession." Sometimes I mean my critic has lost the debate because they resorted to personal attacks. In that case, I claim victory and scamper away to happiness. Other times, the personal attacks are not associated with an argument. In those cases, I mean the "confession" to be about the person's poor mental health. I'm no mental health expert, but insulting strangers is rarely a sign of good mental health.

When a critic (a jerk) enters "fight mode" by hurling a personal insult at you on social media, they expect an insult in return or perhaps a blocked account. What they don't expect is a puzzle. What the heck does it mean when someone says they appreciate a confession you never offered? It instantly changes the tone of the exchange and puts you in charge because you know what you mean, and your critic wants to know because it is about them.

Don't tell them. Walk away. That's how you win.

I'm also testing another reframe I borrowed from a Twitter follower that goes like this.

Usual Frame: An insult hurts because it means someone dislikes or disrespects you.

Reframe: A stranger's opinion of you—even if it gets published in *The New York Times*—is little more than their personal diary entry.

No one cares what you write in your diary. That's between you and yourself. If you choose to make your opinion public, that doesn't suddenly make it matter. Think of all the dark thoughts you keep to yourself. Do they matter to anyone else? Nope. Saying a dark opinion in public doesn't suddenly make it matter. It's still just a diary entry in a different form—boring and unimportant.

For completeness, I must explain why you might see me engaging my critics more than my reframes suggest would be wise. I direct energy to a critic when they make a defamatory and untrue claim of fact that would live forever as truth on the Internet unless I deal with it. In those cases, I want any future sleuths to know the false claim is disputed and why. So I create an "interesting" body of semi-abusive content to draw attention away from the false claim and toward my often-funny debunking of it.

For example, a prominent attorney on X accused me of being wrong on my pandemic commentary because I tend to "trust institutional data." I saw a need to remind his followers that I'm the creator of the *Dilbert* comic and have been mocking institutional data for more than three decades. Sometimes I think no one on the planet distrusts institutional data more than I do. A recurring theme of my daily livestreams involves reminding people to distrust data from *any* source and why. The attorney's post got a lot of attention and amplified existing misconceptions about me that were, in my opinion, an obstacle to my good intention of being a useful public voice. So I sprayed some insults in his direction on X along with some debunking to make sure as many people saw the correction as saw the initial claims. Fake news can get twenty times the attention of a correction, so I try to solve for that problem by creating more of a spectacle and sometimes being more of a jerk than observers feel is appropriate.

Don't be like me! My situation is unlikely to be relevant to people who are not public figures. I only mention it because my actions will seem

inconsistent if you don’t have that context.

Germaphobe Reframe

I was a bit of a germaphobe until I learned that exposure to germs, bacteria, and the ordinary "ickiness" of living makes your immune system stronger. The worst thing you could do is avoid all of that until one day something gets you.

Now I think germs make me stronger. Because they do. But it isn't the truth of the claim that makes the reframe work for me. The power comes from the programming that is embedded in the words.

Usual Frame: Germs will harm me.

Reframe: Germs make me stronger.

This isn't the sort of reframe that is likely to work instantly. It might have an immediate impact for a few readers—maybe you—because people are so different, but that would be unusual. For most, it will take time and repetition. Start by doing all the same cleaning and precautions you would always do, but over time you might find yourself getting a bit more flexible about the vigor you put into avoiding germs. You're not in any rush. Just repeat the reframe whenever you feel yourself worrying about germs. Give this one a few months before you know for sure if it's working or not.

It might seem crazy that a person can reframe a bad feeling into a good one using nothing but the power of words. But it's more common than you'd think. The next reframe is my best example of that.

Coldness

Recently, I watched a friend assembling a fire pit in near-freezing weather conditions during a party at his mom's home. Everyone who saw him toiling away in the backyard asked if they could get a jacket for him. He waved them off, completely comfortable in his short sleeve shirt. I was wearing full Antarctica protective gear as I chatted with him to ask how he was able to handle the cold.

He told me he once had a psychedelic experience in which he realized the sensation of cold was nothing but a signal from his body to his brain, and unless there was a risk of frostbite, it was nothing to fear. Now he simply disconnects the signal whenever he wants, and the cold registers as a sensation, but it is not alarming or uncomfortable.

I didn't believe him, of course. It sounded like a prank.

Time passed, but I couldn't stop thinking about his story. One day, a friend invited me to join him to try cryotherapy—the sub-zero chambers you stand in for a short time to summon a variety of alleged health benefits. I declined because I don't handle the cold well. A few weeks later, another friend messaged me to say he started a cryotherapy business, and he invited me to try it. I declined because, well, you know.

I'm sold on the potential health benefits of cryotherapy. Everyone I know who has tried it raves about it. But as I said, it isn't for me. I prefer cool temperatures to hot, but I can't handle that kind of cold.

Time passed, and one day I was taking my garbage receptacles to the curb, four of them in total, counting green waste and recycling. The entire task takes maybe five minutes, and I was debating getting a jacket versus toughing it out for five minutes in my t-shirt and jeans while temperatures were in the high forties. It wasn't going to hurt me, but history suggests that after two minutes I would be shaking like a chihuahua in a gunfight.

Suddenly, a thought popped into my head that connected the stories in this chapter. If cryotherapy is good for your health, wouldn't exposure to ordinary cold weather give you *some* portion of benefit? For my story, it doesn't matter if that makes sense because you know a reframe is coming and reframes don't care about facts or logic.

As I opened the garage door for my five-minute suffering in the cold, I wondered what would happen if I reframed my sensation of cold as a signal of getting healthier and stronger instead of as a signal to flee. And so I did. I told myself the blast of cold air would be good for me, like a poor man's cryotherapy. It would make me stronger. The colder, the better!

I walked outside. It was cold. I think. But I didn't feel cold. I … felt … stronger.

What???

I would never suggest this reframe will work for you. It's too weird even for me, and I'm literally a hypnotist. This is right in the middle of my strike zone, and still my mind was blown.

It was the last time I experienced feeling cold.

Okay, okay, some context. I live in Northern California, so my definition of "cold weather" won't necessarily match yours. I know that because I grew up in upstate New York. You adjust to your environment.

I won't suggest this reframe will work below 45 degrees Fahrenheit, or somewhere in that range. But if you have a normal life, you will find yourself in these too-cold-for-comfort situations all the time. Next time it happens to you, consider this reframe.

Usual Frame: Coldness is pain and a signal I am in danger.

Reframe: Coldness makes me healthier and stronger.

If this reframe works for you, it might change your life in an unexpected way. You always knew reality had a subjective component, but it is hard to grasp how deep that subjectivity goes. If you learn to turn coldness into a positive experience with one reframe, you will—perhaps for the first time—understand your power to author your entire life.

Tragedy and Recovery

When someone close to you dies, it is normal to feel a great sense of loss. But once you think you have suffered enough, and you want to feel better, a few reframes will help.

The first reframe involves asking yourself if you are feeling bad about the deceased or yourself. It probably isn't entirely clear in your mind.

Usual Frame: Death is a tragedy, and I need to feel bad about it.

Reframe: The deceased has no more problems. How did I make this about me?

Easier said than done, of course. I don't suggest this works as well when a child passes as it does when your grandfather finds his way to the beyond. It's easier to get over the so-called natural kind of passing compared to anything unexpected. But the reframe helps in both cases.

Don't fight with the logic of the reframes should you decide to try them. Let the words do what words do—influence you whether you like it or not. Every non-trivial word carries a little program with it.

Here's another reframe I have found useful, having experienced more than my fair share of family and pet deaths. The reframe involves accepting that which can't change (death) while finding value in your final service to the deceased. Here's how I play it.

Usual Frame: Death is a tragedy.

Reframe: It is an honor to help another pass.

The United States military uses this reframe. When a soldier dies, we are all trained to honor the passing in the most respectful way we can. There is a ceremony and a set of rules that serve to siphon off some of the pain and repackage it as service to the deceased.

When you experience the death of a loved one, your instincts push you into feeling tragedy, loss, and pain. Once you have had enough of that, and when you are ready, start tossing these five words around in your mind to release some of the pain: Gratitude. Respect. Honor. Privilege. Service.

There might not be a greater honor than helping someone pass to their next state of being.

Death and Afterlife

Depending on your religion, you might find comfort in imagining your deceased friend or loved one enjoying the infinite comfort of eternal life in some other dimension. If that doesn't fit your worldview, I have a reframe that might help. Unfortunately, I have had plenty of opportunities to test this one, and it helps me a lot.

Usual Frame (for some people): Death is the end of this person.

Reframe: Energy can change form, but it never disappears.

You are not the person who was born to your parents with your name and identity. Your body has changed over time, your personality has changed, and most of the cells in your body have died and been replaced. Yet there is still a coherent "you" that we all recognize. Additionally, you are a social being, meaning part of "you" includes your impact on others, especially family and close friends. One way to view the "you" that is smeared across time and has entirely new body parts is that you are a continuation of some original energy that was in part guided by your DNA. The chain of cause-and-effect that started with your parents and led to the creation of baby-you continues through life but also extends beyond it in a physical sense as well as conceptually.

For example, my deceased mother, Virginia Adams, is the creator of not only three children but also some of the strongest material I have included in my books. She is deceased, yet she is permanent. The impact of her life continues to reverberate.

If you are generously thinking my mom got lucky by creating an author who could amplify her essence after she was gone, that's true, but her impact on me is no more than my deceased stepson's impact. I see him in every young man. And one of my greatest joys now is learning to play drums, which is an extension of his interest in playing. He's always with me when I am drumming, if you know what I mean.

People don't disappear when they die. They become part of the forever. Energy can change form, but it never disappears. If you do things right, your specific energy will have a pay-forward quality to it, and that is something you can feel good about today.

Who Controls Your Feelings

Most of us grow up believing our feelings are the product of whatever is happening to us. It sure seems that way. When you can control your schedule, where you go, and who you are with, you generally feel happy. When you have no control over those environmental variables, you are less likely to feel happy. Therefore, logically, your environment and your situation are controlling how you feel. By that view, you are nothing but a victim of a random and often cruel universe. That's no way to go through life. I recommend flipping that worldview using this admittedly weird reframe.

Usual Frame: My feelings are the result of my situation.

Reframe: How I feel is my choice.

The first time I heard this reframe, it hit me as both ridiculous and powerful. I've since used it often to clear my mind of junk feelings. I simply told myself I could choose not to be bothered … and it worked. Or at least it took off the edge.

I would love to tell you the logical reason this reframe works, but I don't think there is one. Maybe it works because the sensation of taking control is generally good for most people. Maybe it works because it gives you permission to feel good. Perhaps it works by triggering you into cognitive dissonance. Or maybe it just yanks you out of a mental prison you put yourself in and returns you to the present. I don't know. All I know is that it has given me comfort. Maybe it can work for you, too.

Don't be surprised if a reframe works one day and then never again, or that a reframe that didn't work for you before starts feeling profound. Try several reframes on the same topic and see what works that day. Reframes are quick and cheap, and you know immediately if they will have an impact; you can feel it. If you don't feel it, try another.

Hate and Anger

I recently saw a wise man on Instagram explain that hate makes no sense because you are punishing yourself for the misdeeds of someone else.

Whoa! Profound.

Or is it? It sounds so clever when you first hear it that you think the universe tapped you on the shoulder and whispered in your ear a truth that only *you* are ready to receive. And you can almost feel it work! The moment you realize you can imagine hate as the absurd act of punishing yourself for the misbehavior of someone else, you can easily release the hate.

That's some powerful wisdom, right?

Not exactly. It's more like a terrific reframe. And by that, I mean it isn't logical, but it still works like a charm because it *feels* true. It isn't literally true that feeling hate means you are punishing yourself for the misdeeds of another because there is no intention on your part to do that. It just ends up in the same place but for a different reason. That's what makes the "magic trick" of the reframe seem true. And that's good enough to get the benefits out of it.

Usual Frame: I hate someone who deserves it.

Reframe: Hate is nothing but punishing myself for the misdeeds of others.

I realize I have accidentally made you think past the sale about hate and anger. I didn't mean to imply you need to lose either of those things. Personally, I have found both to be empowering at different times. If a bully confronts you, some hate and anger might be exactly the fuel you need to balance out the situation.

On most days, I'm 5'8" and 157 pounds of wise-cracking sex appeal. If a bully encountered me, he'd be tempted to give me the wedgie I appear to deserve. However, if that bully triggered me into a different state of mind—let's say intense anger—I have an angry facial expression that can clear a city block. I have no idea how physically dangerous I am because no one has ever stuck around to find out.

My point is that both hate and anger can be superpowers if you learn how to harness their energy. I don't recommend inviting hate and anger into your life, but in the normal course of being interesting and awesome, you are likely to attract some of it. I'm suggesting you don't always want to reframe it away. Sometimes you want to use it. You can use that anger to end a relationship that needs ending, to stand up to someone who frightened you before, to embrace a deep challenge, or to accomplish anything else that requires your maximum effort. I like to convert my negative energy into muscles. I can run farther and lift heavier in an angry mood than a good one. And once that energy is turned into muscle, I can go home relaxed.

Usual Frame: Hate and anger are toxic feelings you hope will wear off.

Reframe: Hate and anger are a superpower level of energy you can use for gain.

Enduring Bad Things

If you have a problem you know how to fix, go ahead and do that. But life is full of suboptimal situations you can't exactly "fix" for one reason or another. Or at least not quickly. You can make yourself crazy wishing things were different or replaying events in your mind as if they will change next time. That's living half in the real world and half in a dark fantasy world of what-ifs, regret, and self-flagellation. Here's a reframe that wants to help, but it's so crazy it couldn't possibly work.

Could it?

Usual Frame: Why can't my problems go away?

Reframe: Everything has a right to exist, including this problem.

I first saw this reframe on Instagram from the Adyashanti (Official) account. The bio says Adyashanti is a spiritual teacher. My first impression was that it sounded like new-age nonsense. My second impression was that it instantly made me feel more at peace. That's a strong reframe. But remember, we are all a bit different, so the reframes that work best for you or me will not necessarily be as powerful for anyone else. This one blew my socks off. I could feel its power when I repeated it in my mind.

I think this reframe works because it pulls you out of the imaginary world of what-if and gives you a "fake because" to accept your problems. *They have a right to exist.* It's a "fake because" in the sense that it sounds like a reason but isn't. It's complete nonsense. But it works for me.

Next time you have a problem that isn't going away soon, just remind yourself that the problem has as much right to exist as you do.

And don't worry that it doesn't make sense. Instead, ask yourself how it feels when you do it. You might be surprised by this one.

Anxiety

One of the greatest keys to happiness and good health involves managing stress and anxiety. It won't matter to your happiness how many skills you acquire over the course of your life if you don't also learn to control how you feel. Feeling stressed and anxious is a terrible experience. The good news is there are several reframes that can help you, and quickly. I use all of these reframes, to good effect, in my own life.

ANXIETY ARBITRATOR
I MADE A LIST OF ALL THE EMPLOYEES WHO NEED SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR THEIR ANXIETY.
THIS IS OUR INTERNAL DIRECTORY OF EVERY EMPLOYEE. IT'S AS IF YOU DID NO WORK AT ALL.
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5-20-22
OR AM I THOROUGH?

Your Ego

In the Success Reframes chapter, I told you that conquering embarrassment is like a superpower for success. It also has a direct benefit to your mental health.

Let me tell you about an embarrassing experience that was so awful I still cringe and perspire when I think about it.

Just kidding. I have no such experiences. I do recall feeling embarrassed at various times in my youth, but from today's perspective, all those stories are humorous. The horrible "embarrassments" of adolescence either faded into dust or transformed into my funniest stories. None lasted.

Eventually, the pattern was too obvious to ignore—embarrassments don't last. And that makes it easy for me to ignore the next potential embarrassment. Worst case, it lasts a little while. Then I get distracted and think of something else.

I can't remember the last time I experienced embarrassment. But I wasn't born this way. It is learned behavior, and it took work. This reframe, which I often repeat in my mind, helped me a lot.

Usual Frame: Your ego is "you," and it must be protected.

Reframe: Your ego is your enemy.

The reframe tells you what to do: Kill your ego. And to do that, you need to beat it to death with actual and potential embarrassments that have one important quality: They don't have a huge downside. Don't be reckless about it. Be strategic. Refer back to the Success Reframes chapter for a refresher on becoming immune to embarrassment.

My career puts me in lots of public situations—interviews, speeches, posts, podcasts, and more. All of these have the potential for massive embarrassment—the kind that follows you forever. I suppose I've blundered into a healthy number of those forever-shames over my career. I seem to rack up a new one every few months. Sometimes they come out of nowhere in the form of hit pieces from political partisans and culture terrorists in the media. When I see them, I repost them. They're attacking my ego, and I banished that useless ghost from my life years ago. None of the hate feels as if it is about me. It's just noise.

The ego reframe works best when you reinforce it with real-life experiences that keep your ego in check. I found the following strategies useful.

Develop a Skill

Get good at something. Anything. Even one skill is a safe space for your mind in case you drift into the “I’m worthless” lane that haunts so many. If you know you can become good at one thing—generally because you practiced it a lot—then you know the differences in skills across humankind have a lot to do with who practiced what. And who-practiced-what has nothing to do with your worth.

Take Some Chances

I talked about conquering embarrassment in the Success Reframes chapter because immunity to shaming is one of the most useful business and professional skills you can acquire. If you are lucky enough to succeed at anything meaningful, bad people will appear from nowhere and shame you for the *way* you did it. That's guaranteed. People who are immune to embarrassment have more options in life, and those options are often the high payoff kind. But hardening yourself against shame and embarrassment also has an immediate benefit in maintaining your mental health. No one feels good when they also feel shame. That's why it makes sense to reframe it out of your life.

As I mentioned earlier, a reliable way to become immune to embarrassment is to intentionally put yourself in embarrassing situations. For example, volunteer to give a speech, sing karaoke in front of coworkers, experiment with your fashion and hairstyle, chat up an attractive stranger—that sort of thing. Don't try to avoid embarrassment. Invite it. You'll get some good stories out of it, and each mini-shame toughens you up for the next one. So take some social risks. Flame out in front of witnesses. Repeat. You'll be amazed how quickly you can murder your ego by ignoring its screaming needs.

Usual Frame: Avoid embarrassment.

Reframe: Invite embarrassment and use it as a club to kill your ego.

If someone asked you to deliver a priceless work of art across the street, you might balk at the suggestion. If you were to slip, trip, get robbed or assaulted, that priceless art might get damaged. How comfortable would you be carrying it? It makes sense to be on high alert to focus on protecting the valuable art. That pressure creates a feeling of anxiety.

Now suppose I asked you to deliver an ordinary potato across the street. If you drop it or damage it, no big deal. It was only a potato.

Think of yourself as the potato and not the priceless art. Only your ego makes you think you are worth protecting. And being worth protecting is what makes you anxious. If you can abandon the notion that every speck of harm that comes your way must be avoided at all costs, you can better relax.

Usual Frame: I am a priceless work of art that must be protected.
Reframe: I am a potato that is easily replaced.
Be the potato.

Worry Versus Curiosity

For many of us, worrying feels like a full-time job that sacrifices quality of life now, no matter what happens later. And often there's not much you can do about how things turn out, assuming you have done all the obvious things one should do in each situation. For example, you intend to study for a test in a subject at which you normally excel. There's no obvious reason anything would go wrong, but we humans can get twisted up thinking about small risks that loop in our minds for no good reason. A reframe might be just the thing you need to break that loop.

This reframe is one I have used with great success. Like many of the reframes in the book, it looks too easy to be true. I don't mean to make any of this sound like magic—because any one person's success with a reframe is hard to predict—but in the unlikely event your brain is wired like mine in this specific respect, you might be surprised how well this reframe works.

Usual Frame: I worry something will go wrong.

Reframe: I'm curious what will happen.

If you succeed in switching your thoughts from your past to your imaginary future, you run the risk of generating anxiety about how things might turn out in your future. I advise you to only imagine positive outcomes, but being human, you will have some worries about the future as well. Instead of focusing on what could go wrong, accept that you live in a world where things usually go wrong—at least a little bit—and instead try to treat the future as a curiosity. What will happen if I do this versus that? You can quickly gamify (turn into fun) the ambiguity of the future. Just keep telling yourself it will be interesting, and you can't wait to find out what will happen.

Can you really gamify something just by wanting to? Yes. It's a thing. For example, with the advent of streaming TV apps, I found myself angry and frustrated every time I wanted to watch something. The chosen app would need an update, or it wouldn't work on the device I wanted to use, or it would say I am already logged in, or my password wouldn't work. After a few years of that nightmare, I reframed watching TV as "hacking into my own account." I'm no longer a frustrated consumer with several streaming apps that have poor user experiences. Now I'm a skilled hacker who will

use every resource at his disposal to break through the user interface of the sign-in process. My dopamine hit comes from successfully opening an app and using it. I generally find nothing worth watching and call it a night. But at least I got my hacker hit of dopamine.

Aren’t you curious if the curiosity reframe will work for you?

What You Can Control

Humans are built for worry. If we didn't worry about the future, we wouldn't work so hard today to make it better. You can't turn off your natural impulse to fret about the future. But you can reframe it to give yourself credit for "doing everything you can do." That's comforting. Having worries is bad enough, but if you compound the worries by worrying you are not doing enough to make yourself safer, your subjective experience will be doubly bad. You might find comfort in reframing your situation from double-bad to single-bad. And by that I mean removing the concern that you are not "doing enough." Here's the reframe.

Usual Frame: Worry about all potential bad outcomes.

Reframe: Control the heck out of things you can control. Accept all outcomes.

I won't be able to persuade you how much better you will feel if you "do everything you can do" to solve a problem. You must experience it. Look for situations in your life in which you can reasonably "do everything you can do" to improve the situation. Notice how much better you feel no matter if things go wrong or right from that point on.

The cleanest example of "doing all you can do" involves your physical fitness. Let's say you are worried about your ability to attract a mate, get a job, or be healthy in general. If you get serious about your fitness and do everything you can reasonably do to make it better, you'll feel a lot better even as you hit rough patches in your life. Fitness is a gift that keeps giving. It touches all aspects of your life. And it is highly controllable. So control the heck out of it and see how much better you feel. Same argument with diet. Eating right and exercising are not easy. But they are 100 percent available to all interested takers. Get control of your diet and exercise and watch how the benefits start solving your other problems.

History Is Imaginary

Are you plagued by events from your past? Most of us are, to some degree. The ugly memories that lurk in the dark corners of our minds tend to emerge on their own schedule and inject anxiety into our lives. If that describes you, I can help.

History does not exist in any material way. You can't grab a handful of history. You can't eat it, punch it, kick it, or photograph it. If your past is causing you anxiety, put the past in its place. It doesn't exist. It never will. It can't touch you.

Usual Frame: History is important.

Reframe: History doesn't exist.

I use this reframe often, and it works instantly for me. It doesn't last, but it can take you out of your negative loop right away. After all, how can I be anxious about something that doesn't exist?

The Virtual Reality Reframe

Try this one right now. Observe the objects in your immediate vicinity and imagine them being some sort of computer-generated creation—like a video game or an animated movie—that looks exactly like what you assume is reality. The point of this reframe is to bring you into the present. And that's all you need. You are only trying to break the mental loop you're in. Any distraction will do, but this one you can do anywhere and anytime.

Usual Frame: Reality is exactly what you see and feel.

Reframe: Imagine the objects around you as virtual objects.

It takes a fair amount of mental processing to reimagine your environment as computer generated, and that's another reason it works. You want your brain distracted with a challenge—otherwise it will drift back to its default loop of negativity.

If you are not a visual person, you might discover some other type of distraction works best to pull you out of a negative headspace. Experiment. Pick a distraction that interests you and engages your brain and see for yourself if it reliably puts you in a different frame of mind. I recently learned how to play drums (poorly), and I discovered it is completely absorbing. My brain must coordinate four limbs working independently plus a brain that is keeping a beat and anticipating the next fill (a drummer word for the interesting flourishes). There is no brain power left to think about any problems. So I don't. And when I'm done drumming, I almost always feel great.

Find the activity that takes over your entire mind. That's your escape hatch.

The Death Bed Reframe

This one goes like this.

Usual Frame: My stress and anxiety are caused by events in my life.

Reframe: I won't care about any of those events on my deathbed.

If you know something is too small to be remembered in your final days of sentient existence, what are the odds your problem is important today? We evolved to care most about what is happening to us here and now. But that frame can make your problems feel worse because "right now" does not include a future time in which those problems are (usually) resolved or at least diminished.

When you use the deathbed reframe, you see your life as bigger than your current problems. That can make the importance of today's problem shrink, at least in terms of how you process it in your mind.

Whenever my young stepson got a scrape or cut, I discovered his attitude would immediately improve if I told him how long the pain would last. I'd look at his cut or scrape with a knowing expression and confidently tell him, "This one is a four-minute situation." It always helped.

I don't think adults are much different from kids when it comes to how we process pain. The degree of pain matters, but you also care how long it lasts. If you don't know how long it will last, that's an extra mental burden on top of the pain. If you know the pain will be done in a minute, you can ride it out with far less mental friction.

Usual Frame: I am in pain.

Reframe: I am in pain for a minute.

When you shift your mind from your immediate pain or problems to some imagined future in which the pain is gone or forgotten—no matter how near or far in the future—you weaken the power of your current discomfort. Try it. You'll be surprised how well it works.

The View from Space

This reframe makes no logical sense but works for me anyway.

Usual Frame: You are the center of your universe and the highest priority.

Reframe: Viewed from space, everything looks small, including your problems

How could imagining yourself looking at Earth from space improve your attitude? Because any kind of perspective shift can interfere with your looping and cascading negative thoughts. It's like taking a walk in the woods or going on vacation to help you forget your troubles and reduce your stress. When the vision-handling parts of the brain are involved, it's hard to hold any other thought at the same time. Looking at the scenery outside or imagining Earth as viewed from space both call on parts of the brain that can absorb all your attention at least temporarily, and that can be enough to take the edge off your worries.

Mental Shelf Space

This next reframe is an all-star in my book. (Literally, in this book.) And by that, I mean it has the most potential for immediately improving your life. It goes like this.

Usual Frame: You need to stop thinking negative thoughts.

Reframe: You can't subtract negative thoughts. But you can crowd them out.

I call this the mental shelf-space strategy. If something bad is happening in your life, it makes perfect sense that you think about it a lot. But there comes a time when obsessing over a negative thought becomes so corrosive you need a mental vacation. You need to get rid of the negative thoughts looping in your head.

Unfortunately, you can't subtract thoughts. Brains don't work that way. You can, however, stay so busy that you don't have time to ruminate on all the bad news. Over time, the memory of the bad thing will fade. You might need to create some new experiences that thrill you so much you can't think of much else. But hey, wouldn't that be fun anyway?

Our brains evolved to solve our problems. If you have problems, your brain will pounce and—for many of us—never release. That's what you want if your problem is one that can be solved—you want your brain to automatically attack the problem and find a solution. But reality is too messy for that. Many of our most vexing problems exist entirely in our minds, like this one:

> *I worry that my friends stopped liking me because of that thing I said.*

For that kind of problem—the usually-irrational worries—your best bet is to bury it with new thoughts and experiences. Fill your shelf-space. Make yourself busy. It works.

For example, as I mentioned, I have discovered that learning a musical instrument takes up so much brain power, I crowd out any competing thoughts while I practice. Compare that to walking or running, which invites stray thoughts. Pick hobbies, tasks, and social interactions that demand your full attention. If you're only using your legs such as taking a walk, that probably isn't good enough. You must get your mind involved.

When I go to bed, I direct my thoughts toward wonderful things that happened to me recently as well as to incredible things I fantasize about happening later. You can't prevent bad thoughts from trying to sneak in, but you can crowd them out with stronger, more addictive thoughts.

The shelf-space concept differs from the mental exercises I described earlier such as imagining yourself from space, imagining your deathbed, or imagining a virtual world. Those hacks also crowd out negative thoughts, but they are entirely mental exercises. The mental shelf-space idea is more about real world actions of all kinds that keep you too busy to think about your worries.

PHILOSOPHY REFRAMES

When you remind people that life is short, they automatically become more flexible because no one wants to squander the precious gift of time on whatever nonsense is making us angry now. The reframe works as well when you remind yourself you won't be here forever.

I don't recommend using this reframe to talk yourself into doing something dangerous. Use it to get moving on something you want to do but worry is holding you back.

Usual Frame: I'm afraid to do the thing I know I should do.

Reframe: Life is short.

The life-is-short reframe can help you get off the couch and make some decisions you keep putting off due to one worry or another. I include this reframe in the Mental Health chapter instead of the Success chapter because the greatest benefit is how it makes you feel. When you frame your life as a limited opportunity, your mind automatically puts more value on each minute of it, and the value of variety, adventure, and curiosity seems greater —much like how you approach a vacation. Your vacation days are limited, so you have an instinct to maximize that experience. Once you reframe your life as a limited engagement, you automatically start operating with more boldness to get as much as you can out of it before you go. That's great for your mental health.

OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder involves thoughts and behaviors you don't want to experience but can't figure out how to stop. In some cases, that might involve needing to check ten times if an iron has been unplugged before leaving the house, or thoughts that disaster will happen if you make the wrong move in your daily life such as wearing the wrong shoes. These are basic examples. The variety is unlimited. What they all have in common is they are irrational thoughts and actions that the afflicted can't seem to stop.

I recently ran an unscientific experiment with my Locals community. I asked any of them who had OCD or knew someone who does to try the reframe I will present to you in this chapter. To my delight, several reported successes. I doubt it will work for everyone, but that's true of reframes in general.

I explained to my Locals subscribers that hypnotists and psychologists know people can be persuaded—and thus their brains rewired—by anything that *feels like a reason* no matter how nonsensical it is. As a hypnotist, I know how powerful nonsense "reasons" can be. In this book, I call any nonsense reason a "fake because." They work best when the subject wants the life change suggested by the fake reason.

For example, if I know there will be a social "fight" over who picks up a dinner check and I want to prevail, I prepare a "fake because" in my mind before the check arrives. When my check-grabbing opponent reaches for the check the same time I do, I slip in the kill shot: "You drove all the way to my town for lunch, so I've got this."

Is that a good reason? No. It only sounds like one. There might be several other variables just as important. Watch how many fake reasons I can generate. These so-called reasons work best if you can touch the check first.

"I got this, for your birthday, in case I don't see you."

"Next one is on you." (An indirect way to say you want to see the person again.)

"We're celebrating your new job." (Even if the new job was two months ago.)

You get the point. There's always some angle you can use to generate a weak or even nonsense reason. I've been doing this trick for years, and it works about 90 percent of the time. And it works because the other person wants a solution to the social awkwardness as much as I do. Any reason will do, including a nonsense reason. In those few cases in which someone fought through my fake because and insisted on paying, they had a strong reason. That's just another way for both of you to win, and you still get credit for trying to pay.

Now consider OCD. No one wants OCD, so this suggests to a hypnotist that a fake because might work for some people in some situations—not necessarily instantly, but perhaps over time, with repetition.

If you have OCD and want to test the method I'm describing, simply invent a fake reason for why you can discontinue your unwanted thoughts and activities, then repeat that fake reason to yourself every time you need it.

Usual Frame: I must do this pattern of behavior or else something bad will happen.

Reframe: I no longer need to do the behavior because less is more.

"Less is more" is a nonsense reason in this context. But it *sounds* like a reason and *feels* like a reason probably because most of us have heard that phrase in situations where it made sense. In business meetings, my experience is that those three words—less is more—make everyone in the room nod in silent agreement because it sounds like something Buddha would say. "Less is more" is a powerful bit of programming code that makes everything it touches seem persuasive. Use that to your advantage.

You can substitute any other nonsense reason that sounds more persuasive to you than "less is more." But it will be hard to beat because it is what I call bumper sticker wisdom—meaning it sounds like something that should be true, and maybe you once heard a smart person say it … or a person who *sounded* smart.

In case you haven't noticed, I am not a doctor. If you have any concerns about this reframe, talk to a professional and get a second opinion. But I don't think you have anything to lose by trying some nonsense reasons and tracking how it works. Good luck!

SOCIAL EVENT ANXIETY

For the purposes of this book, social event anxiety refers to entering a room full of people you don't know or don't know well and feeling uncomfortable. I'll give you some reframes that will remove much or all of your social anxiety.

The first reframe is the most important.

Usual Frame: Confidence is something you're born with.

Reframe: Confidence is something you learn.

By the time you finish this book, you will have learned a variety of tricks for acting confident. But that isn't the only way to develop confidence. Many people report building confidence through learning martial arts or excelling at a sport or hobby. Warren Buffett famously attended a Dale Carnegie class when he was young, as did I. Both of us can confirm it teaches you to be confident in front of an audience or during social chit-chat. You can also improve confidence through physical fitness, better sleep, and even breathing exercises. There are many ways to go about building confidence, and you probably have a mental list of your own. All I'm adding is the reminder that you can easily manage your confidence if you try. It's a gift that is available to all.

When you enter a social situation, you probably ask yourself two questions:

1. How should I act?
2. How are people judging me?

If you knew exactly what to do in each social situation, imagine how much easier everything would be. You've probably experienced working or volunteering at some sort of business or event in which you interacted with the public in a well-defined way. If you knew how to do your job, you probably didn't have much social anxiety. You knew what to do, and you did it. I'll teach you how to approach any social situation with the same confidence in the "rules" as you might have on the job.

The second question is about people judging you. The good news is that if you learn the rules of social engagement (which will happen in the next few minutes), people will be impressed by your poise and judge you kindly. If you get the what-to-do part down, you won't need to worry about being judged. You'll be the star of the gathering. A quiet star, perhaps. But people will notice.

The first reframe for this topic involves imagining you are going to an event in which all the other participants have been selected for their poor social skills. You are the lone exception. You have strong social skills and everyone else knows it. In this imaginary scenario, would you have much social anxiety? Probably not as much as normal because you would feel more capable than the other participants in the skill that matters most at that moment.

The simple techniques I will teach you in this chapter are almost guaranteed to put you in the top 10 percent of socially skilled people. And that means you won't have to use any imagination to know you are more capable at working a room than nearly anyone else.

Usual Frame: People have better social skills than I do.

Reframe: I am in the top 10 percent of people with good social skills (after reading this chapter).

Another useful reframe involves how you see the other people at the gathering. Are they sources of potential embarrassment? That's an unproductive way to think of it. I recommend reframing the participants as each having a problem you are uniquely qualified to solve. Their problem is that they feel socially awkward.

Most people are uncomfortable meeting strangers. If you have social anxiety, you're closer to the norm than the exception. With a little practice, you can learn to see a room full of strangers as a bunch of problems you can solve just by engaging with them. Their social anxiety will go away as soon as they are talking to a nice person who shows interest.

Usual Frame: Each person at the gathering is a source of potential embarrassment for me.

Reframe: Each person has a problem (social awkwardness) that I can solve right now.

How to Pick the Right Target for Conversation

If you enter a room and the people already there are mostly paired off or in small groups to converse, you have the extra pressure of trying to break into an ongoing conversation. Here are some tips:

1. Men who are having a high-energy conversation often won't open their body language and let you in when you sidle up to them with the clear intent of becoming part of the action. Men who act that way have poor social skills or are asserting rank. If you try to enter a male conversation and get frozen out, pull out your phone, pretend you just got a message, and walk away to handle it. Find an easier target.
2. Women are more likely to open their conversation circle if you make your intentions clear. If you see an alpha woman doing most of the talking in a small group of women, that's ideal. A strong woman will invite you in and initiate introductions.
3. Look for the strongest social players and approach them first, male or female. You can usually spot them. They are moving effortlessly across small groups and dominating conversations. Strong personalities like meeting new people and enjoy connecting people with others. If you see one of the strong players leave a small group and head for the bar for a refill, consider intercepting. When meeting a strong social player—someone with the skills you are acquiring right now—the awkwardness disappears. Strong players know the rules. You're a strong player now. If you want to make sure the other person knows you have skills, introduce yourself. That alone would flag you as a strong player in social situations.
4. Look for the awkward loners in the same predicament as you. They would LOVE someone to come up and say hi. The degree of difficulty there is near zero.

How to Introduce Yourself

This is all you must do:

1. Make eye contact and smile.
2. Extend a hand to shake.
3. Say, “Hi, I’m Scott.” (Use your name, not mine.)

Most people will tell you their names as they shake hands. The most socially awkward people will not. If needed, follow up with, “What’s your name?” Speak their name out loud at least once to help you remember. Use it in a sentence if you can, and right away. People love to hear their own names. It’s an easy and instant bonding technique. Be a name-user. This one tip puts you in the top half of talented social talkers. Make it your superpower to remember names. All it takes is focus and effort. Now that you know how important it is to remember and use a person’s name, maybe that will increase your attention to every name you hear in the future.

How to Be Interesting

Are you worried you're not that interesting? You might be right. Most people are not great conversationalists. It's a rare skill. But that's no problem because the worst thing you could do when meeting a stranger is talk about yourself for too long while attempting to be interesting. Instead, you want to ask questions and ***show*** interest. You might need to fake your interest for a few questions until you find a topic you both like. Start your question stack roughly in this order:

1. What brings you here? (Or, What is your role today?—Use words to that effect.)
2. Where do you live?
3. Do you have kids?
4. What do you do for a living?

The reason these questions come first is that the answers are easy. No thinking or cleverness is required. And your follow-up questions will be obvious. For example, if someone has kids, you ask the ages or where they go to school.

If those questions strike you as too personal for someone you just met, that's an illusion. People *love* answering easy questions about themselves in awkward social situations because they know exactly how. That's how you solve their problem. If you ask me where I live, I know exactly how to answer, and I'm darned glad I'm not standing alone pretending to look at text messages on my phone.

When you introduce yourself and ask questions of a stranger, you are solving the stranger's biggest current problem: *What do I do right now?* You can accurately assume most people at social gatherings are struggling to appear socially capable. You can make their part easy. And if you do, they will want to talk to you all night.

Usual Frame: No one wants to talk to me. I'm boring.

Reframe: Everyone enjoys talking to people who show interest in them.

You're only a few minutes into this chapter, and already your social skills are in the top 10 percent of any human gathering. Literally. No kidding. And you are about to get even better.

Being a Huge Fake, But in a Good Way

As much as we like to think of ourselves as "keeping it real," we also know we change our personalities based on who we're with. You wouldn't talk to a toddler the way you talk to a cop, for example. You wouldn't even talk to your boss the way you talk to your coworkers. And you probably don't talk to anyone else the way you talk to your lover or spouse.

The people with the worst social skills can't get past the illusion that "being yourself" and "keeping it real" are good strategies. Instead, I say go with what works. And what works best is modifying your communication style to optimize it for each situation.

Usual Frame: Be yourself and keep it real.

Reframe: Adjust your communication style for the situation.

Once you accept the fact that we are all "acting" to some degree when we communicate, you can go all-in and turn it into a technique. I learned this trick from a college peer who was taking acting classes. When he talked to older adults in the college administration, he literally ***acted*** like he was one of them. The act was so transparent to his peers that it was hilarious. But how did the college administrators receive it? They loved this polite fellow who made eye contact and generally acted like a capable young man. It didn't look comically exaggerated to them at all. His act only looked hilarious to his friends. The "trick" he used—literally acting—was perfectly acceptable to his target audience of older adults. My guess is that the adults knew he was "acting," but since they were acting too, it probably seemed normal. I was the one who was uncomfortable when he went into his act because I was only beginning to understand "the show" that adults put on for each other. Don't deny the show. If you can, call on your acting skills and create an interesting version of yourself that isn't a lie.

How to End a Conversation

If you go to an event to network or to meet new people, you don't want to get bogged down talking to one person all night. You need some tricks for ending a conversation gracefully. Here are three classics that work every time:

1. My drink evaporated. Can I get you anything at the bar?
2. Excuse me, I need to use the men's (or women's) room.
3. I need to do some more mingling. It was great meeting you (or catching up with you).

Physicality

As you know, humans are deeply influenced by appearance. One way to reduce your social anxiety is to work on your diet and fitness until you feel confident in any public setting. If you know you look good, you'll feel less awkward.

I'm a short, bald man with corrective lenses. If that's all I am, I'm not feeling too comfortable breaking into conversations with strangers. But I'm also a lifelong gym rat, so I'm generally more fit than the public at large, no pun intended. That helps me feel confident in social situations.

Diet and exercise are the most important levers in your life. I don't know what science says on this topic, but if you get food and fitness under control, I think your improved health and vitality would translate into more confidence in social situations. We act better when we feel better.

Have Stories

Your social interactions should center around asking questions and listening, but inevitably you will want to tell some stories as well to keep up your end of the conversation. I recommend framing your experiences—*as you have them*—in terms of stories you will later tell.

In other words, if something interesting is happening to you, imagine how you would tell the story. Then keep that story at the ready if you need it. It could be your answer to "How was your day?" Here are some useful story-making tips:

A good story is simple to understand, creates curiosity in the listener, and has an interesting payoff or punchline at the end.

Never exceed three names in a story. If Bob is the subject of your story, and he was with four friends, don't name them unless that is somehow relevant. Names clog stories. Reduce them to the minimum.

Do the entire story setup in one sentence, *e.g.* "I was at the recycling center yesterday when this big bus pulled in …" Avoid the long windup, as in, "I noticed my recycling container was filling up faster than usual because we started buying bottled water." That part is irrelevant to the story.

Practice saying the punchline, the big reveal, or the shocking ending in one clean sentence. The body of your story can be variable each time you tell it, but make sure your "payoff line" is tight and simple.

Practice! Storytelling is a skill. The more you do it, the better you will be at putting your body language and acting skills into it. People will react to your emotional state as much as the details of the story. If you are enjoying telling the story, the listener picks up that joy. And you will enjoy your storytelling most if you are comfortable doing it. So practice.

AVOIDING STRESS

I distinguish stress from anxiety because stress usually has obvious causes whereas anxiety can be a general feeling that is immune to what is happening that day.

Sometimes our stress comes from worrying we will make poor decisions. But there is at least one class of problems that don't require you to know which path is best: things you can easily test.

If the decision is important, and you have a way to test it small before committing to a larger decision, you have everything you need. You don't need anyone's opinion on whether it is a good idea. Test and find out.

It can be stressful to think you might make a wrong decision. But it isn't stressful to know you can test your ideas before committing.

Usual Frame: Is this a good decision?

Reframe: Can we test it small?

If you have corporate and business experience, you are probably wondering who needs to be told that testing before committing is a good idea. It's obviously the smart way to go when you can. But people who do not have that work experience won't reflexively ask if a thing can be tested small. Remember the test-it reframe and try to turn it into a mental habit.

No One Cares

It can be stressful knowing others will judge you no matter what you do. I get judged a lot in my line of work, so I have loads of experience reframing it out of relevance. I'll show you how.

Start by realizing there are primarily two kinds of people in the world:

1. Bad people who don't care about you at all,

and …

2. Good people who won't judge you for being human.

There are some weirdos in the middle, but we can ignore the exceptions. For example, your ex-spouse or romantic partner might care what you do and judge you for it. But you already solved that problem by breaking up.

Most of the world either doesn't care about you at all, or they like you and don't judge. The latter group might even make you feel better if you screw up. The point is that worrying about what others think of your performance is living in an imaginary world in which people both care about you and judge you. That is far from reality, and this reframe helps you find that truth.

Usual Frame: People judge me, so I feel bad when I mess up.

Reframe: People only care about themselves. They don't care what dumb thing I did recently, even if they mention it.

A lot of the so-called advice I give people depends on being immune to failure and the opinions of others. It's a useful skill. Years ago, I had laser treatments on my face to remove some imperfections. I was advised to stay home for a few weeks because I would look monstrous until the purple bruising went down. And sure enough, I looked like I'd just lost an MMA fight with Conor McGregor. So I stayed home and waited for the damage to heal.

But I'm impatient. My cabin fever got so bad I decided to go shopping at my local mall and endure the staring and derision coming from my fellow

humans. Nothing remotely like that happened. Instead, I went shopping, and no one stared at me, no one asked what happened, and no one expressed sympathy. No one cared at all. And what was every one of them thinking instead of thinking about me as I deserve?

They were thinking of themselves, I assume, because they care about themselves. They don't care about randos at the mall. I can't read their minds, but I do know their opinions about my face had no impact on me whatsoever. I shopped. I went home. It was a normal day.

Prior to that day, I was already well on my way to not caring about the opinions of strangers. But that day in the mall, I finished my journey. And my concern about being judged never came back. I welcome you to borrow my mantra:

The strangers care about themselves.

The strangers care about themselves.

The strangers care about themselves.

Reducing Stress Is Your Job

At the beginning of this book, I explained why reframes don't need to be true or logical to work. This next reframe is logically incompatible with a reframe we already discussed: "Your job is to get a better job." If the apparent contradiction bothers you, pick the one you like best. If both reframes work for you, use them both. That's what I do.

This is one of the most valuable reframes in the book.

Usual Frame: Stress comes with the job.

Reframe: Reducing stress IS your job.

We work for a variety of reasons, but work is only one part of a larger system for reducing stress. I don't earn money just to have it. I earn money to make my life more pleasant, which includes reducing my stress about surviving.

When I was in my mid-teens, I realized stress and anxiety would eat me from the inside unless I taught myself how to deal with it. So I started treating stress reduction like a full-time job, and I'm glad I did. Today, I rarely experience any major stress or anxiety. The triggers are all there, but I've learned to silence them.

This isn't a book about reducing stress, so I'll only go as far as listing all the methods I've sampled on my own journey. I do this to make my point that I treat stress reduction as my job or at least a side job. It's a lot of work. But it is also a lot of reward. This isn't a list of recommendations for you; I'm only showing you how seriously I treat it.

My Stress Reduction Systems

Here they are:

Meditation (in my teens and college years)

Yoga
Self-hypnosis
Physical intimacy (especially with other people)
Daily exercise
Go to sleep and wake up at consistent times
Black-out curtains for the bedroom
Healthy diet
Frequent walks outdoors
Scheduled alone time
Change of scenery
Building a talent stack

The last item on the list requires explanation. You already know that assembling a set of skills makes you highly employable. At a young age, I also realized it's a great source of comfort. The more skills with commercial value I assembled, the less I worried about my future. I knew I'd be fine no matter where I ended up.

SURVIVOR'S GUILT

Let's say you are the only survivor of some sort of disaster. If that happened to me, I would interpret it as luck on my part and nothing more. But many people would reflexively seek meaning for the event and wonder, "Why them, not me?" That's called Survivor's Guilt.

WELL, I SURVIVED THE LAYOFFS, BUT NOW I HAVE SURVIVOR'S GUILT.
I GOT FIRED AND NOW I DON'T KNOW HOW I WILL EAT.
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IT'S NOT A COMPETITION, BUT I WOULD NOTE THAT YOUR SUFFERING IS THE "ALL ABOUT YOU" TYPE.

Mechanical World

The best way to reframe survivor's guilt depends on your philosophical view of reality. If you believe we are a mechanical world unfolding according to the exact laws of physics, use this reframe.

Usual Frame: Why did I survive when others did not?

Reframe: It's no different from a clock reading 2:00 PM exactly once a day. It is just cause and effect. It has no meaning.

In most disasters, there are survivors. They can't all have meaning. But it's a safe bet that some of the survivors will search for that meaning. Likely, no meaning is there to be found. Sometimes people just survive tragedies. Maybe this time it was you. That's the end of the story.

If you have a statistical view of the world, this reframe might work best for you.

Usual Frame: Why did I survive when others did not?

Reframe: Every specific thing that has happened to me since birth is extraordinarily unlikely. This is more of that.

Have you ever had bad luck that was super-unlucky? I'm talking about coincidences that are mind-blowing. Sure, you have. We all have. That's because luck follows a natural distribution. Most situations involve average amounts of luck, while the two extremes of super-bad-luck and super-good-luck do happen, but not often.

Purpose

Your existence on this planet is extraordinarily unlikely. It took over 13 billion years of evolution to bring you to this exact place and time. On top of that, you are the product of a winning sperm and a willing egg. All the competing sperm that day failed. Your sperm-daddy was the only one who closed the deal. From that moment on, your life has been an unending sea of near-misses and near-hits. If you survived an accident that took everyone else's life, that coincidence is no more remarkable than everything that led up to that moment. We live in a sea of coincidence.

If you are a believer (in God), I have the strongest reframe for this situation.

Usual Frame: Why me?

Reframe: God needs you here for something important.

Is that true? I don't know. But it's comforting for believers. I've seen people make good use of that reframe. I can't speak from personal experience on this one as I am not a believer. But I find value in imagining I have some sort of purpose, God-given or otherwise.

Permission

This is a weird one. Sometimes we just need "permission" to release guilt. I'm here to give it to you. In my capacity as author of this book—which you have enjoyed enough to read this far—I give you permission to release your survivor's guilt. What happened to you was bad luck, or maybe God's will, but it was not about you.

Guilt of any kind is a social phenomenon, and by that, I mean you couldn't be guilty unless other people existed. Guilt is how you see yourself through the eyes of others. If no other existed, you would have no one to feel guilty about and no eyes to see yourself through.

The function of guilt is to reduce the chances of you making an unwise decision in the future. But if the tragedy dogging you is unlikely to happen again, your guilt serves no biological or social function. You need not be warned against making the same mistake because the situation will never come up again. Respect your guilt for the useful function it serves, but let it go when it has served its purpose.

Usual Frame: I feel a responsibility to hold this guilt.

Reframe: You have my permission to release your guilt.

Sometimes all you need is an independent nudge to let it go. Let me be your nudge.

Think of the Dead

Do you think the people who did not survive want you to suffer? They do not. Your respect for the dead is holding you captive. The dead are flexible. They will not complain. They would want you to be happy, not guilty. Let the dead have their way. It's the least you can do for them and the best way to respect them.

Usual Frame: I feel bad that I was the lone survivor.

Reframe: What would the dead want you to do—suffer or be happy?

The Past Is Imaginary

I've already talked about the past being imaginary, so I will skip the details here. The quick explanation is that you can decide you popped into existence today and need to navigate a life you just took over. This reframe helps me let go of the past. I think it can work for you, too.

Take a breath and look around the room. Imagine you just popped into existence as if in a video game, and the game just started. All prior games have been deleted.

Go.

Could Have Done More

Often, we feel we "could have done more" to help someone avoid tragedy. And it might be true largely because it is *always* true. Saying you could have done more—about anything—is so true it is meaningless. *Of course,* you could have done more. But since it would always be true you could have done more, no matter what, it has no meaning. Let it go.

Usual Frame: You could have done more.

Reframe: Everyone can do more. It is a meaningless concept.

ADDICTION

Silicon Valley entrepreneur and philosopher Naval Ravikant says the greatest personal challenge in modern times involves avoiding (or managing) addiction. If you don't have an addiction problem, you probably think this reframe doesn't apply. But I guarantee you are addicted to something, which might include social media, daily exercise, gambling, sex, or anything else. In my experience, everyone is addicted to something. But not everyone is addicted to something harmful, which leads me to this reframe.

Usual Frame: Avoid addiction.

Reframe: Choose your addictions wisely.

This reframe acknowledges the reality that humans are by nature easily addicted, but we are not addicted to the same things in the same ways.

For ethical reasons, I can't recommend you pursue any *specific* lesser addictions to replace your more dangerous addictions, but I do recommend you think in those terms. Look for ways to consciously add positive addictions to your life to crowd out your less-helpful impulses. I recently added learning to play drums to my addiction stack, and I love it. I'm also addicted to waking up early, posting, and exercising regularly. The worst one on my list is X, but I tell myself that's part of my job. I have other addictions as well, but none of them involve opioid addiction or unlawful conduct. I fill my schedule with positive addictions to leave less room for the toxic type.

I sometimes call this reframe the Pleasure Unit Theory. The idea is that humans need a minimum daily amount of pleasure or else life will not be worth living. This explains why people do dangerous illegal drugs—they don't

feel they have other options for sufficient pleasure. This suggests an indirect way to treat addiction: Introduce lots of pleasure substitutes. Ideally, you also want some meaning-of-life activities in your schedule, too, such as being useful to others. Pleasure alone won't keep you in a good place.

I have too much experience with addicts to tell you they can be cured by taking up some substitute hobbies. I'm suggesting that whatever method you use to treat an addiction will be easier if your alternatives offer lots of pleasure. This is what it looks like as a reframe.

Usual Frame: People with bad judgment often pursue dangerous and unproductive pleasures.

Reframe: People need a minimum level of pleasure to make life worth living, and if they can't get it safely, they will get it unsafely.

This reframe is subtle. At first glance, both frames seem to say something similar—that humans pursue pleasure. But it is deeper than that. Once you realize people ***need a daily minimum*** of pleasure, you understand why people will break laws, cheat, and lie to get it. You will also understand the best way to reduce bad behavior is to flood the zone with safe and legal options that can act as substitutes for illegal stuff.

The practical use of this reframe is that if you know someone struggling with any kind of vice or addiction, there's not much chance they will stop unless they can find some other source of acceptable pleasure. This idea is not too far from the concept that addicts need to "hit bottom" before they decide to turn their lives around. Hitting bottom usually signals that the pleasure part of the addiction has collapsed. At that point, the only reasonable way to pursue pleasure is without drugs.

What do almost all rehab organizations do as the first step? They remove all sources of pleasure from the patient. I'm frankly surprised traditional rehab has ever worked for anyone, but clearly some people do succeed at getting straight. I believe the success rate would be higher if patients trying to quit their primary source of pleasure had easy access to healthy and acceptable alternatives. Compare trying to quit a vice while having nothing else to give you pleasure to, for example, sitting in a massage chair listening to your favorite music in a room full of puppies. One of those conditions will make you want to take drugs more than the other.

I used to believe in something called willpower. The idea is that some people had this amazing ability to endure discomfort and pain to achieve their goals.

Others had no willpower at all, it seemed, as they would make one bad choice after another to chase small pleasures.

Eventually, I learned willpower isn't a thing that a human or any other creature possesses. It's just a way for observers to explain behavior without knowing what is happening in anyone's brain. You might want to pause here and debate me about the nature of free will, but I will ask you to hold that debate because reframes don't need to be true or logical.

Here's the reframe.

Usual Frame: Some people have no willpower. They are weak.

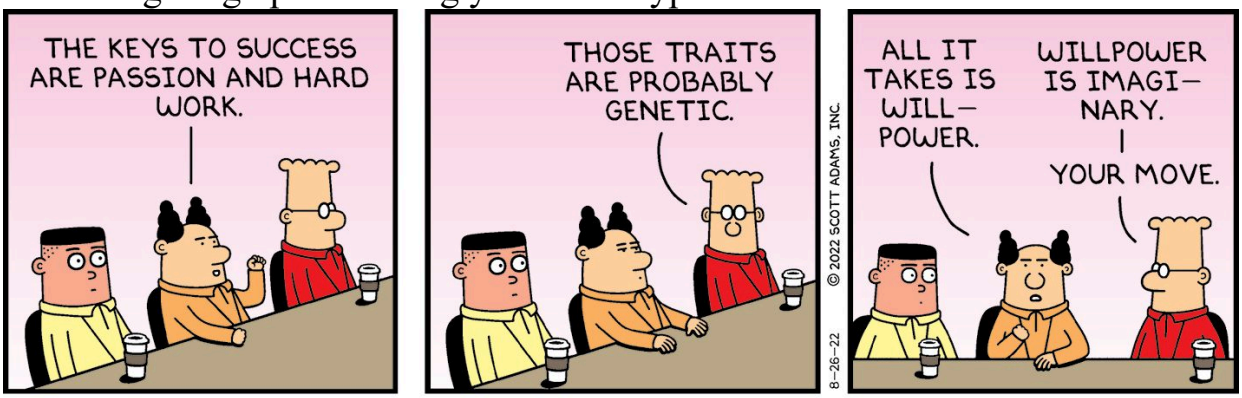
Reframe: Some people get more pleasure from certain vices than you do.

I no longer judge overeaters. I used to think if I could maintain a healthy weight, so can anyone else. Now I know I was mistaken. Once you realize some people enjoy eating more than others, the whole world starts to make sense.

On a scale of 1 to 10, enjoyment of food is maybe a 7 for me. I *like* food. I'm just not *in love* with it. If I were, I'd weigh 400 pounds. And it wouldn't be because I lacked willpower. It would be because I loved food.

I learned this reframe from my hypnosis instructor decades ago. He was overweight and explained it this way: "I like to eat." The context was his larger explanation of why hypnosis isn't especially effective for weight loss—it only works when the subject wants the change. And people who "like to eat" don't want to lose one of their greatest loves.

Compare the treatment of overeating to, for example, a fear of flying. No one *wants* to have a fear of flying, so hypnosis could potentially help with that. But cutting down on sugar, cigarettes, or alcohol would be harder because it involves giving up something you love. Hypnosis isn't an ideal tool for that.


THE KEYS TO SUCCESS ARE PASSION AND HARD WORK.
THOSE TRAITS ARE PROBABLY GENETIC.
ALL IT TAKES IS WILL-POWER.
WILLPOWER IS IMAGI-NARY.
YOUR MOVE.
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BAD DAYS

Everyone has bad days, except me. I only have days that are suited for one kind of purpose versus another. If everything goes well in my day, I feel happy and satisfied. But if everything goes wrong in my day, I can use that energy to handle the ugly tasks I had been putting off, and that usually works out well.

For example, if you are having a bad day anyway, you might as well fire that employee you didn't want to deal with before. Your day won't get worse.

Is there some kind of risk you have been wanting to take on but couldn't quite pull the trigger? Skydiving? SCUBA lessons? Quit your job? Whatever it is, it will seem less risky on a bad day.

Have you been wanting to increase your workouts but couldn't muster the energy? Try increasing your exercise routine on an otherwise bad day. Your negative energy will turn into muscles.

Usual Frame: There are good days and bad.

Reframe: All days are useful in different ways.

I'm exaggerating about never having a bad day, but I think you get the idea.

Ending Your Life (Don't)

Sixties superstar Janice Joplin famously sang, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." That blew my mind the first time I heard it. How could freedom be such a sad and lonely thing? But the longer you live, the more you know it's true.

Usual Frame: Freedom is the ability to do what you want.

Reframe: Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.

Divorces and job losses and tragedies of all kinds can give you a sense of losing almost everything. But gaining your freedom in the deal is not a bad consolation prize. If you have a decent talent stack and good health, some extra freedom might be exactly what you need to have a fully realized life. I got through two divorces using this reframe so I can tell you from experience that it helps a lot.

If you have a limited talent stack, you won't be able to take advantage of freedom right away, but at least you will have the freedom to develop the skills you need to thrive later. So do that. That's always the right play.

The best time to use the freedom reframe is when you are extra sad and broken, and life has kicked you in the head. If you start thinking dark thoughts about ending your life, the fastest way back is to remind yourself you have *nothing to lose*, which means you are free. Free to talk to a stranger. Free to ask for a raise. Free to join a club without shyness, free to make a long-overdue phone call, free to take a scary adventure, change your fashion, shave your head, learn an instrument, get a tattoo, or sample a new religion. Go nuts. Have some fun. Put yourself out there and get shot down. Laugh. Try it again. You're free.

Here are a few more reframes you might find useful if you are fighting off the feeling that you might want to end it all.

Usual Frame: I can't handle this for the rest of my life.

Reframe: I can do anything for a day.

If you can't imagine being happy in the future, don't spend too much time thinking about it. Instead, ask yourself if you could handle one more day of this suboptimal life if you knew for sure there was a chance of things improving. Of course you could. And there is always a chance that things will get better. I'm improving your odds right now.

Maybe things will look better tomorrow, or maybe it takes longer. Either way, narrow your timeframe of consideration from the entire rest of your life until you can see your own future as a manageable unit. You don't need to fool yourself. You only need to shift your focus. Remember, reframes treat your brain as a programmable machine, not a logical machine. Logic won't persuade you that your long-term future is better than you think because you have no way of knowing. This problem calls for a logic-free solution, and putting your focus on "one more day" can help you get that done. Now use that day to try these brain hacks.

Be Important to Someone

If you don’t feel a sense of purpose in life, you can find a purpose the same way most people do—by becoming important to some other person, pet, or group. When you feel important to the safety and wellbeing of another, you automatically feel a sense of purpose. If you want to keep it simple, volunteer to work at an animal shelter. That will give you an instant connection. But also form a plan to upgrade your social life, which might take longer. A great way to start is by taking your fitness routine to the next level. It will be good for your mind and will probably multiply your social and romantic options.

Make Stress Optional

If the stress of life is getting you down, I have a story that might help you. In the mid-1990s, I was working my day job at the local phone company while my comic strip side hustle slowly became my primary income. The minute I knew I didn't need my day job for money, all the stress of work evaporated. Coworkers who were reliable at being unreliable stopped frustrating me and started to seem funny instead. My deadlines no longer weighed on my mind. I wasn't concerned with making a professional impression or making my boss like me. My day job duties were the same bag of mini-horrors and insanity as always, but because I was by then only showing up for work by choice, work transformed in my mind to something closer to entertainment.

Here's how that phenomenon can work for you. If you have decided (and I hope this never happens) to end your life, take a moment to imagine how that decision removes all stress from your daily life today. Once you know you have full control of whether you are alive or not, being alive might start to feel the way I felt when I didn't need my day job but went to work anyway. You won't care about the little frustrations when you know they're optional. They might even make you laugh.

Reframes won't necessarily be enough to completely turn things around for you, so also make sure you know how to get professional help for people in your situation. A quick Google search for a suicide hotline or therapy provider will serve you well.

PAST TRAUMAS

This is one of the most powerful reframes you will ever encounter. I performed this reframe on my livestream audience, and the immediate feedback was, "Make sure you put that one in the book!" Countless viewers reported immediate relief. You may feel this reframe right away, too. But like all reframes, the more you repeat them in your mind, the stronger they can get.

Usual Frame: I am a victim of my past traumas.

Reframe: History is imaginary.

This reframe works best with the context this book provides. If you paraphrase these points for someone else, you will be doing a form of "talking hypnosis" on your listener. That's what I call it when there is no induction—the "you are getting sleepy" part—and instead just guide the subject's thinking in a useful way.

History Does Not Exist (Still)

As I mentioned earlier, history doesn't exist in any physical sense. It's only a concept. Stop imagining the past controlling you with its invisible hand. Your past is non-existent. History is a dangling artifact of chemical and electrical reactions. Your past was real when it happened, but today it is 100 percent imaginary. Once you internalize that truth, you are free. You control the present.

What Is Real Is in the Room with You

Look at the objects in the room. They exist in your subjective reality. They matter. Now touch your arm or shoulder or chin. You are real, too. Is anyone else in the room? They are also real because they are present. Their history and your history are not in the room. Those memories are like loose wires and beverage stains in your brain. They have no importance.

Finding Now

Here's a reframe that blew my mind. It's a classic I hadn't heard until recently. It belongs to Lao Tzu and goes like this:

If you are depressed, you are living in the past.

If you are anxious, you live in the future.

But if you are at peace, you are in the present.

I heard another version that seems to fit the times better:

If you are angry, you are living in the past.

If you are anxious, you are living in the future.

In reframe terms, it looks like this.

Usual Frame: I am angry because something happened.

Reframe: I am living in the past.

and …

Usual Frame: I am anxious.

Reframe: I am living in the future (but not in a good way).

You can take the edge off any negative emotion that is past-focused or future-focused—whether caused by trauma or not—by moving your focus to now. This next tip will help you find the now.

You Were Born Now

Imagine you were born into the world right now with no history, no childhood, no past. Would the dangling wires in your brain have meaning to you? You might have the memories still, but they would seem to you like remembering a dream and so of little consequence.

Your history and the dreams you remember have a lot in common in the sense that neither of them exists in the world of today. It makes no difference that your past happened in the real world and your dreams did not. From the perspective of *right now*, neither history nor dreams exist. They both round to zero. You probably already believe your dreams are not important. It's a small step to say the same about your history; it once existed as events in the present, but today your history does not exist. And by virtue of not existing, it does not touch you.

Imagine a Positive Future

If you struggle to keep your mind in the present and want to avoid negative thoughts, remember that it isn't possible to stop your mind from having thoughts in general. If you succeed in thinking less about your ugly past, new thoughts will flow in to fill the void. You don't want those new thoughts to simply transfer the negativity you feel about the past to negativity about your future. Put conscious effort into imagining a wildly successful future for yourself. Picture the outcomes you want. Imagine a future in which everything goes your way and things turn out amazing.

For most of my life, I avoided negative thoughts about my past by imagining a future in which I somehow became such a famous cartoonist that the president of the United States would invite me to visit him in the Oval Office. That visit happened in 2018, and it ruined my system by making my fantasy real. I needed a new fantasy. So I upgraded my imaginary future to include winning a Nobel Prize. I'm not fussy about which one. Science or Peace would be good.

You can imagine winning a Nobel Prize, too! Imagination is free! And it's way better than whatever else you were thinking about. If you prefer imagining you are winning a sporting event or inventing a new source of clean energy, those are good, too. Just make sure your fantasy is more engaging than your imaginary history, so your energy is pulled in that direction.

Delete Sketchy Causation Assumptions

I once believed I was the product of my childhood traumas. I could draw a straight line from my various bad experiences to the person I am today. It all seemed so obvious. And I wasn't the only one who could do this. Everyone who had ever taken therapy seemed to be able to connect the dots in their lives as readily as I could. And science supported us. Your past is a big influence on who you become, they say.

There's only one problem. As a hypnotist, I know I could persuade you that your current mental problems—whatever they might be—were caused by the bee sting you got when you were six. Even if you never got stung by a bee.

Oh, wait, I'm sorry. I didn't mean *you* specifically. I think we can all agree you are too clever to fall for that sort of mental manipulation. I'm talking about other people. Approximately 20 percent of the public can experience profound effects from hypnosis, and the rest can get various degrees of benefits. Interestingly, almost no one believes they are in the 20 percent, including me.

My point is that humans reflexively assign meaning to things when there is none. Maybe you are right about which trauma caused you to be the way you are. But that would be a lucky guess. It is far more likely—given human nature—that you have a personal problem today and you also had some past traumas, so you picked one of them and imagined it as the cause of your current woes.

As a kid, I had an irrational fear of drowning. If you asked me why, I would tell you about a time in my childhood when I was walking across a bridge with my family and a barge was passing beneath. My father wanted me to see the barge, so he lifted my toddler body up to the railing to look over. For some reason, I interpreted that as him trying to throw me over the railing to my watery death, and it traumatized me. So is that the reason I had an irrational fear of water?

Probably not.

In hindsight, it seems more likely I was traumatized by the event because I was already afraid of drowning. It's easy to get the causation backwards.

Humans can rationalize just about any current bad behavior as caused by past traumas. Are you overeating? It was because of that bad experience in your past. Are you promiscuous? It was that thing in your past. We can connect anything to anything and sell it to ourselves. Sometimes we might be right. But in no case does it matter *if* we're right. What matters is that if you tether your current problems to the past, you limit your options for dealing with the problem. But if you untether your present problems from your past traumas, you can solve them faster and for good.

If you believe your present self is permanently nailed to your past self and you can't change the past, you're stuck in a negative mindset for solving your problems. That's where these reframes help. They're designed to decouple you from your anchoring belief that you are pinned to something in the past.

Usual Frame: You are the result of your traumas.

Reframe: You are a random bundle of loose wires.

If you are the result of your traumas, there isn't much you can do about it in the short term except wait for the next trauma. But if you release the past and see your brain as having a bunch of loose wires for no reason, you know what to do—test each wire and reattach it if appropriate. But how do you do that with dangling brain-wires?

Here's how.

Unexpected Superpowers

One of my superpowers is my terrible childhood. I'll spare you the details, but I was in substantial physical pain from a health issue every day of it. I solved that problem by the time I went to college, but that hideous experience made me nearly invulnerable to discomfort if I needed to do something difficult to accomplish a goal. Work all weekend? No problem. Rent a windowless room with a shared bathroom until I could afford better? Easy. Work all day and take classes at night? Sure. Exercise even on days I feel bad? Let's get started.

Once you REALLY know what a bad day feels like, everything else feels like a walk on the beach. For me, that feeling has never worn off. I can generally outwork and outlast anyone who had a better childhood. I might be wrong about that but note how good I feel about myself when I have that filter on life. And feeling good is what counts.

Perhaps you had an acceptable childhood but suffered some other trauma in your personal or professional life. I'm about to weaponize that trauma for you. I hope you use your new power for good.

Usual Frame: My trauma crippled me.

Reframe: My trauma is why I can kick your ass.

Whatever hurts you also makes you different from the people around you. You might be more alert to danger, less afraid of embarrassment, wiser, more mature, angrier (in a good way), more determined, more focused, and more willing to take smart risks. You might even discover that your trauma gives you a purpose in life, such as helping others avoid similar fates. Trauma takes much from us, but it never leaves without tipping. Find the power it has given you and focus it somewhere positive.

I'M TAKING THE REST OF THE DAY OFF TO RECOVER FROM TRAUMA.
I ACCIDENTALLY SAW A VIDEO CLIP FROM TV NEWS.
© 2020 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
8-1-20
CAN'T YOU BLOCK THAT?
I TRIED, BUT THEY KEEP FINDING WAYS TO SNEAK IT PAST MY DEFENSES.

PLANNING YOUR LIFE

While it can be good for your mental health to live in the *now*, I suspect some people are locked in the *now* in a way that prevents them from planning for their own futures. That's the group who needs this reframe.

Usual Frame: Live in the now.

Reframe: Imagine even your smallest actions influencing your future.

Earlier today, I took a leisurely three-mile walk to pick up my car from a tire shop. As I walked, I imagined what my body would look like if I kept up my current exercise habits. And I realized I do that sort of mental exercise with nearly everything I do, both big and small:

If I eat something, I imagine my future weight.

If I exercise, I imagine my future muscle structure.

If I learn something, I imagine the doors it will open.

If I walk across a parking lot during the day without wearing a hat, I imagine going to my dermatologist to deal with the sun damage.

You get the idea. All day long I'm judging my *smallest* actions for how they will influence my future, and I make that imagined future visual and specific, at least as much as my mind can conjure.

I have no idea if my planning reflex is a genetic propensity or if I learned it from my parents. I have memories of my mother talking about my need to make the right moves while young to set myself up for the future. I think I was about twelve when she took me along to drop off some documents with a lawyer. She wanted me to know what a high-paying job looked like so I could emulate it. Years later when I chose a college, I picked one that could support a pre-law career path.

Fortunately for me, I also imagined a future in which winning for my client usually meant someone on the other side lost. I didn't want to dedicate my adult life to a profession in which nearly every client is unhappy and half of them end up more so depending on which side "wins." So I changed my plans and decided to become a banker long enough to learn how to someday launch my own business. After I set that general direction for myself, every action I took from then on had to fit my path—or at least not detract from it. Every bite of food I ate, every step I ran for cardio, and every skill I acquired was in service of my entrepreneurial future either directly or indirectly.

I'm trying to be transparent about the fact that I might be a weirdo when it comes to how much I planned and visualized my future. Still, my hypnosis experience tells me anyone can build a habit of connecting their current actions to their future outcomes. It's a Pavlov's dog situation, meaning you can program any mammal's brain to have a specific response to a specific stimulus. Works with dogs and works with humans.

Imagine you spend a few days setting random alarms on your phone to remind you to ask yourself how your current actions serve your future self. If the alarm goes off when you're eating junk food, you imagine yourself less healthy in the future, and that triggers you to correct course. If the alarm goes off while you're searching for classes to upgrade your talent stack in a clever way, that's perfect. I speculate that you can teach yourself to mentally project into the future even your smallest decisions. If you repeat the process enough times, it should become automatic, just as Pavlov's bell triggered the dogs to salivate before they saw food.

I don't know if you need to set random alarms to build this kind of habit or if you can remember to ask yourself how all your actions create a path to your preferred future. Everyone is different, so experiment with a few systems of your own to remind yourself to imagine how your current actions will ripple into the future.

Irrational Fears

You probably know someone who is afraid of flying but not afraid of riding a bicycle. That's an example of reading the risks wrong. Flying is far safer than biking. It just looks or feels as if it would be more dangerous.

You probably knew that. Even the imaginary person in my example knew it. But knowledge isn't good enough to conquer anyone's fear of flying. If it were, no one would be afraid of flying. If you want to rewire your mind to fix an irrational fear, logic won't get it done. You must fight fire with fire. You need something irrational and sticky, just like the irrational fear you are targeting for eviction.

Now, what would be a tool to fix your thinking that is irrational but works anyway?

Answer: Reframes.

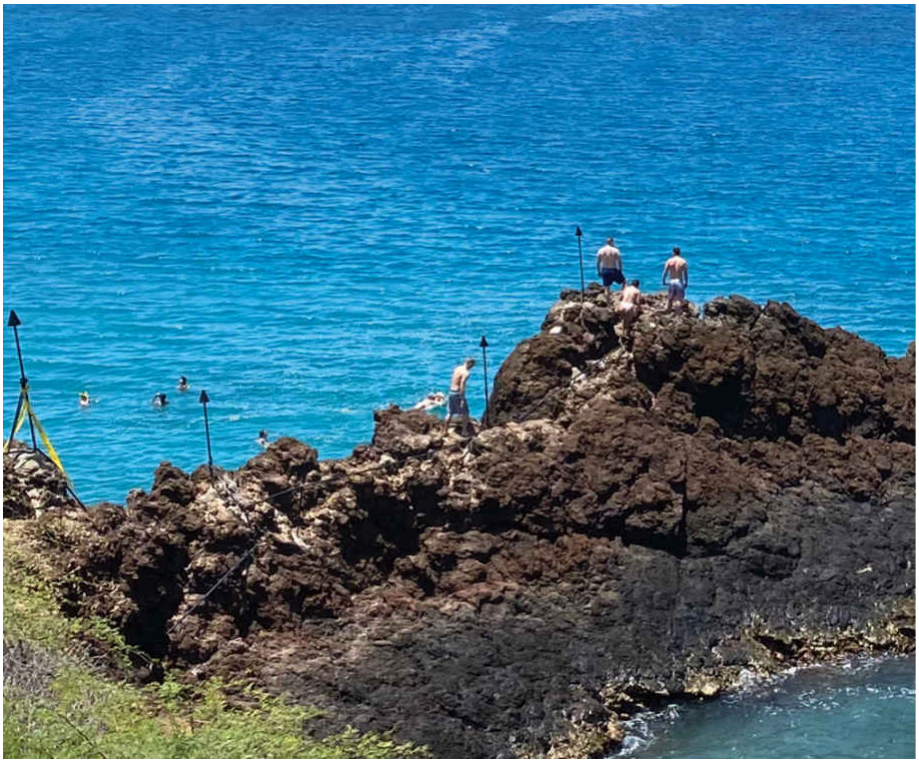
In our imaginary example, I would not target the fear of flying even if that is the only problem on the table. I would instead target the general idea that one can evaluate risks by looking at a situation and using common sense. This reframe will take some explaining, so stick with me.

Usual Frame: Safe things are safe. Dangerous things are dangerous.

Reframe: Safe-looking things can be dangerous. Dangerous-looking things can be safe.

Consider the scene shown in the photo. I took the picture while writing this chapter. Young people are climbing jagged rocks up a perilous path to reach a spot from which they can jump into the ocean below. The top of the rocks, where jumpers go, looks to be about as high as the roof of a two-story house. In the water below are some swimmers watching the show, while snorkelers happily swim past the rocks looking for turtles and whatnot. Below the surface on most days are scuba excursions that travel around that cliff to their preferred destinations and back.

Question: Which group has the highest risk?



If I hadn't already primed you, you might have said the people making the perilous journey to the top of the cliff are taking the greatest risk. Or perhaps the scuba divers because they have the risk of equipment failure underwater. Or maybe you think the spectators floating in the waters below are in danger of being struck by a jumper.

But it turns out that snorkeling is (probably) the most dangerous activity in this photo precisely because it seems the safest. Weak swimmers with snorkel equipment are tempted to go too far past the cliff without realizing how hard it might be to get back. It's a safe-looking activity that is dangerous. I know this from personal experience. I'm reasonably fit, and I had to push hard to get back.

The non-snorkeling swimmers below the cliffs lazily float out to that viewing area and back. They don't risk the frothier waters.

The scuba divers and the cliff jumpers have the most dangerous-looking activities, but they can see that risk as clearly as you can. So they take extra-extra-extra care. They take so much care, they turn it into the safest thing happening at the beach.

Commercial air travel is similar. You can be forgiven for thinking it looks dangerous because it is, after all, a gigantic metal tube in the sky that is stuffed with humans and flown by a guy who just had a fight with his

girlfriend and … she is the copilot on your flight. Or something like that. You get the point. The whole "flying" situation feels super-sketchy.

And that's why it isn't.

There would be no air travel if engineers and managers had not beaten the risk out of it until it is now one the safest things you can do.

The reframe I suggested is just something to repeat to yourself every time you are assessing risk: "Safe-looking things can be dangerous. Dangerous-looking things can be safe." Keywords: "can be."

The proposition here is that making it a habit to repeat the reframe every time you assess risks will, over time, make it your default first-take in the future. All it takes to reprogram your brain is focus and repetition. It doesn't take truth or logic. Just repeat the phrase every time you get reminded of it and let the rest happen on its own.

If you don't think simple repetition of phrases can program a brain, just look at anyone on the opposite side of politics from you. Don't those people look to you as if they have been programmed with mindless slogans that don't have any grounding in fact or logic?

They think the same thing about your team, whatever one that happens to be. And you're both right. Ninety percent of political thought is phrase repetition. The good news for you is that reading this book will ensure your place in the 10 percent who know it.

So the next time you see a political story in the news, ask yourself if someone is trying to tell you a safe thing is dangerous or a dangerous thing is safe. That's pretty much all of politics. Politicians and pundits convince their base to evaluate risk incorrectly by programming them with repeated phrases. That's all it takes. Political persuasion is more powerful than the public understands.

Use that power for yourself. If you want your brain to act differently, remind it to do so with sticky, repeatable phrases. Over time, they become permanent structures in your mind. You are the author of your own experience.

Where Happiness Comes From

Have you noticed people seem less happy in recent years? Science suggests social media is making us sadder, and one assumes the news in general isn't helping. The only good coming out of this realization is that we get to reframe our experience of happiness in a more useful form.

Usual Frame: Happiness comes from within.

Reframe: Use the external world to program your brain for happiness.

If you think happiness is just something happening inside your head, you are simultaneously right and in the wrong place for a solution. The way to reprogram your brain is by learning to treat your environment as a user interface for your brain.

Do you feel grumpy when you haven't eaten lately? Try eating something. Suddenly you don't feel so grumpy. That's an example of using the physical environment to program your brain.

You already know the obvious ways to improve your mood by manipulating external things:

Eat when hungry.

Sleep when tired.

Exercise when stressed.

Have sex when you're in the mood.

Work (the productive kind).

If you get the Big Five right, you're probably happier than the people who don't. Personally, I don't enjoy sleeping, and I snack on healthy food all day long, so I don't watch those two variables when tracking my happiness. But I do find a direct correlation between my happiness and the number of these three things I get done in my day:

Exercise

Sex

If I do two-out-of-three of those, no matter which two, I have a “good” day. If I do all three, it’s a great day. If I only do one of those three—even if it’s the most fun activity on the list—I feel hollow by bedtime. The good news is that my two-out-of-three formula for happiness is achievable on most normal days. Your personal formula for happiness might add or subtract a few items compared to my list. But if you find your “Big Three” by experimenting and paying attention to outcomes, you can easily turn bad days into good. Just see what is missing on your checklist and go get it. I can’t tell you how many bad days I turned into good ones by exercising when I didn’t feel one hundred percent in the mood. I just knew it was one of my big three needs, and I knew how to meet it.

Let’s also add beauty to the list of external happiness inducers. When I checked into the hotel in which I am writing this sentence, I had two room options at the same price. One room had the vibe of a prison cell, and the other was like being in paradise. Same price, just different layout and design. (I chose the paradise one.) In general, when I’m in a physically beautiful place, I feel good, and when I’m in a visually barren place, I feel worse. Managing exposure to beautiful spaces is a simple way to boost your happiness.

If you’re looking for an explanation of why my top three or top five variables create happiness, my hypothesis is that acting in ways that are compatible with your biological imperatives creates happiness as the reward. I believe we evolved to find meaning and happiness in mating—and not much else—because that’s all any species needs to survive. A species only needs to be successful at making extra copies of itself. Everything else is less important.

So it stands to reason that when you do anything related to the mating instinct, you feel a sense of meaning and happiness. Any time you‘re dating, having sex, flirting, or raising kids, you are involved with the mating instinct. Those examples are obvious. But I extend that instinct to include the modern version of hunting and gathering, i.e., going to work and later buying groceries. I also include exercise because it makes us healthier, which is critical to mating success. That’s why my happiness seems to be directly related to whether I productively worked, exercised, or had sex that

day. Those keep me most closely tethered to my mating instinct even though I have no biological children. I also suspect that learning anything useful is related to the mating instinct because it signals you as a more capable provider.

I extend the concept of being close to your mating instincts to all forms of showing off because that also seems related to mating. If you win a big competition, you generally feel great all day. That's the mating instinct. You just signaled to the world the quality of your genes by winning something in a competitive situation.

You won't need endless examples to see the pattern. Lots of things we do every day are directly or indirectly related to our mating instincts. So ask yourself how closely related to your mating instinct is your daily experience. If you spent the day fixing a problem with your insurance coverage—and not much else—that won't make you happy. Find a way to get closer to the mating instinct, without necessarily having children if that isn't your calling. You'll be surprised how well it works to boost your mood. And if having kids is your thing, the country will thank you because we have a baby shortage at the time of this writing.

You might recognize my reframe about using your environment to program your mind as similar to Dr. Jordan Peterson's recommendation to "clean your room" if you don't know where else to start improving your situation. On first exposure to the idea, it sounds trivial to the process of success. Surely there are plenty of successful packrats with hoarder-like workspaces. But if you are not already on your way to success, cleaning your room is a great exercise in gaining control over your environment on a small scale. Any micro-progress in the right direction is likely to give you energy for more. That's the direct way that cleaning your room helps—success breeds success—and no matter how small you start, success can build on itself.

There is another way to frame cleaning your room that you might prefer. This reframe recognizes the physical environment as part of your mind, even if not physically connected to your brain. When you put your body in an organized and pleasant environment, your mind picks up that vibe. If your room or workspace looks like a garbage truck exploded, your mind will be distracted by the chaos. I use this reframe.

Usual Frame: My mind is in my brain.

Reframe: My mind includes my brain, body, and physical environment. Any change to one changes the others.

If your mind isn't giving you what you want, reprogram it by making changes to your body (diet, exercise, location, light, etc.) or changes to your physical environment (clean your room, get some outdoor time, etc.). You'll need more than that, but these are always a good place to start.

In my house, I have different rooms to stimulate different parts of my brain. My Man Cave in the garage is designed for creativity. Every object in the room is chosen by me to have that impact. For example, being near my newly cleaned whiteboard automatically stimulates the idea-generating part of my brain. That's called a *key* in hypnosis jargon. When you pair a mental state with something physical and repeat often, the physical thing (the key) will trigger your mind into the state it associates with the object. That's why your dog goes nuts when you reach for the leash. The leash is a key. Train yourself the same way but without the leash part.

You can't think your way to happiness. If you want to fix your mind, you will have to move something, do something, learn something, or change something. If you don't know where to start, start anywhere you can. The important thing is to act. You'll figure out the rest as you go. That's how most of life works—you figure out what works by doing it wrong until you know how to do it right.

CHAPTER 4

Social Life Reframes

I grew up in a small town in upstate New York and somehow avoided learning any social skills until I was an adult. I scrambled for decades to figure out the rules of healthy social interactions. I won't claim I mastered the art, but I can save you about forty years of embarrassment by summarizing much of what I learned in a series of reframes. This chapter includes all the reframes I wish I'd heard when I was a young man.

BE YOURSELF

A popular notion is that we all have some core nature that is good and valuable, and everyone else will see it, too, if we just act natural. "Be yourself," the wise ones tell us. And if someone doesn't like it, too bad!

It's hard to pick the single worst advice ever given, but "be yourself" is in the top five. Would it kill you to work toward being a better version of yourself?

When I got rich making the *Dilbert* comic in the 1990s, people asked me if I thought wealth would change me. I usually laughed and said, "I hope so. That was the point." I wanted wealth to make me feel successful, fulfilled, happy, less stressed, and even healthier. And I hoped it would make me feel less selfish and more inclined to help those less fortunate. I think all of that happened and on schedule.

I once believed that "aging" would be all bad starting at around age thirty. I'm writing this at age sixty-five and can report that I have been wrong for thirty-five years straight. I suppose my basic personality has been consistent over time, but I've clearly evolved into a different sort of creature, and I like the change. I wouldn't go back to any of my younger days. Imagine if I thought "being myself" back then was a good life strategy. I can't imagine the outcome. Instead, I took the attitude that self-improvement is available in abundance, so I grabbed all I could grab, as often as I could grab it.

Usual Frame: Be yourself.

Reframe: Become a better version of yourself.

When people tell me they "dress for themselves" as opposed to impressing others, I assume they're either lying or unaware of how humans are wired. Dressing for yourself feels like the worst fashion strategy of all time. Instead, dress for the impact you want to have on others. Whatever that is.

Which of these two things will feel better:

1. Attracting a potential mate whom you marry, have three kids, and live a wonderful life.

or …

2. Walking past a mirror and thinking, "Damn, I look good to only me."

Okay, I might have inserted some bias into those choices. But I think you get the idea. How you present yourself will have an enormous impact on how others treat you. People are shallow and visual. That means you will have better social interactions if you dress for other people, not yourself. And ultimately, your relationships are the building blocks of your long-term happiness. Manage them with care. Self-esteem is important, too. But it's only one building block to better personal relationships. If you were all alone in the world, no amount of self-esteem is likely to make you happy. You need other people for that.

Would you like a surefire way to boost your self-esteem? I have a suggestion: Make others respect you. You already know how to get that done: Take care of your health, finances, family, and be kind to others. That's about it. If you do the basics, respect comes easily. And that's 80 percent of what you need for a healthy sense of self.

For the remaining 20 percent of your self-esteem, go ahead and beat yourself up for not being better. That's a productive tension, which can help pull you where you want to go. We humans don't do well when all our problems are solved. Be thankful for any useful irritation that is getting you on your feet and making you try harder. Don't lose that.

Usual Frame: Learn to love yourself as you are.

Reframe: Be glad your brain is pestering you to improve.

Imagine the self-critical voice in your head as one part of you that is talking to the rest of you … and then don't take yourself too seriously. You do your best work when you are self-critical. Attacking your own self-esteem is an example

of you operating perfectly. You wouldn't want it any other way. Self-criticism is how you power up to make the changes you want to make.

GIVING ADVICE

In the course of your daily life, you will encounter people who ask for advice as well as people who don't ask for your advice but you are sure you need it.

Resist the urge. Use this reframe instead.

Usual Frame: This person needs my advice.

Reframe: This person might need some information, empathy, or some help organizing their thoughts.

Given my flawed character, if you were to offer me advice, I might respond in a defensive way. My first instinct would be to tell you why your advice is worse than whatever I was already doing. If I accept your advice, it will make me feel dumb for not solving the problem on my own. I might feel as if I moved down a rung on the social ranking. I hate getting advice even though my cartooning career depended on it. As I mentioned, I'm flawed. I'm also typical. People don't respond well to advice, sometimes even when they ask for it. It's a normal human thing.

Instead of advice, suppose you asked me if I'm aware of a new study that could change my decision. I like learning new things, especially stuff that is relevant to my life. I would see your mention of the study as helpful, and I would be likely to research the new information on my own to confirm it. That's how I would turn your advice to me into my advice for myself. If you frame your advice as nothing more than an offer of information, I will happily accept it. Later I will feel as if I made my own decision, perhaps influenced by what you told me.

A method I use that does not involve giving advice is asking questions about a person's thought process and priorities. If I can prompt you to describe how your plans make sense and you struggle, you are likely to self-correct without my annoying advice. The gaps in your logic will be apparent to you as you discover you can't describe your idea coherently.

Also, be aware that people enjoy complaining—and being heard—more than they like getting advice, even if they ask for it. Sometimes the best way to help is to be an empathetic listener. I'll trust you to read the room and know when listening is the best strategy for being helpful.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

In my teens, I worked at the Sugar Maples Resort in upstate New York, and I learned a valuable lesson from my boss. One of my jobs involved working the front desk and taking complaints from customers on various imperfections in their rooms. My boss told me my job was to write down the complaint in front of the guests on a form titled "Work Order." That's how the guest would feel "heard." And I could tell from the guests' reaction that it worked. They always acted as if they had successfully completed a task. They left the front desk happy.

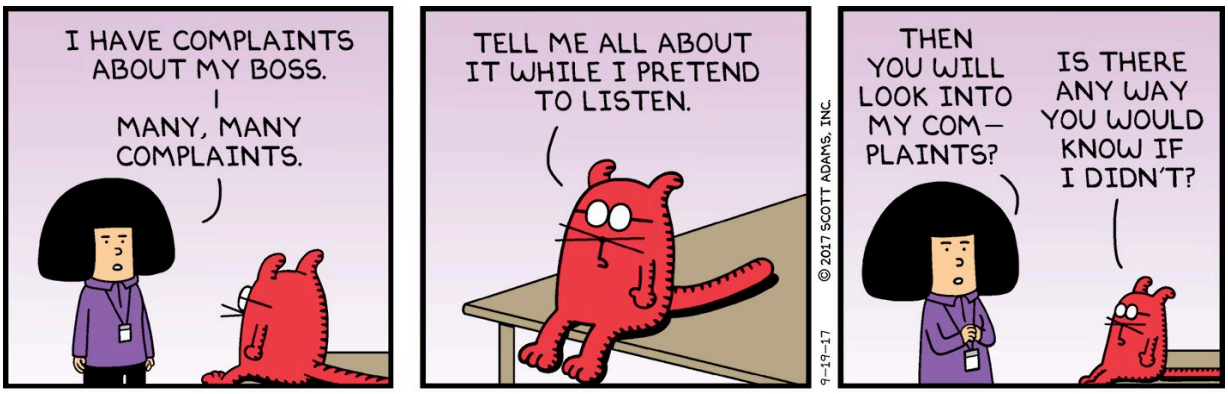
The flaw in their plan is that many of their complaints were logically or practically impossible to fix. That didn't matter, as my boss explained. He told me some guests just enjoy complaining, so if you listen to them, they're happy. You don't even need to fix their problem. The "being heard" part is what matters more to some guests.

We fixed whatever was fixable, but that was maybe half the complaints. As events played out, my coworkers and I started competing to see who could crumple up and toss the Work Order form in the trash the fastest before the guest got too far away. Only one guest heard the crinkling and challenged my coworker about it. I think he said he discarded something else.

Usual Frame: People who complain want solutions.

Reframe: Some people who complain just enjoy complaining.

The practical implication of this reframe is that you need to know what people want, not what they ask for. If you deal with enough complainers, you soon learn which ones are doing it for their own entertainment, or to feel powerful, and which ones have valid problems in need of fixing. There is no obvious way to know in advance the motivation for people's complaints. But you can usually figure it out if you look for a pattern in which the complainer puts more energy into the complaint than the solution.


I HAVE COMPLAINTS ABOUT MY BOSS.
I MANY, MANY COMPLAINTS.
TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT WHILE I PRETEND TO LISTEN.
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9-19-17
THEN YOU WILL LOOK INTO MY COM-PLAINTS?
IS THERE ANY WAY YOU WOULD KNOW IF I DIDN'T?

TOXIC PEOPLE

You might have someone in your life who has a so-called "strong personality." That's one way to put it. But if you accept that frame, you're probably already a victim or will be soon. If someone with a "strong personality" does something messed-up that affects you, you might be tempted to chalk it up to that strong personality.

Don't do that.

"Strong personality" is usually a nice way to say a person is toxic. And in my experience, toxic people can't change. They have a different reward system, which means they're acting rationally according to their priorities. For example, your reward system might involve feeling good because you helped someone. A toxic person would be rewarded by watching you fail so they feel superior.

The only known way to deal with toxic people is to remove them from your life and block them on all social media. Don't fall for the trap that if you fix their current problems, it will be smooth sailing. Toxic people never run out of current problems.

Usual Frame: This person has a strong personality. I must become stronger to deal with it as an equal.

Reframe: This person is toxic. I must escape now.

The universe is very old. In all that time, no one has ever expelled a toxic person from their life and regretted it. You will not be the first. It's one of the few things in life that works every time.

COMPLIMENTS

ROBOBOSS, CAN THIS RELATIONSHIP WORK? AFTER ALL, I'M A HUMAN...
AND YOU'RE A SOULLESS MACHINE DESIGNED TO GIVE SHALLOW COMPLIMENTS TO EMPLOYEES.
YOU'RE GIVING 110%.
STOP... DON'T MAKE ME LOVE YOU.
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Giving a compliment is an easy way to improve your life experience. When you offer a sincere, unsolicited compliment, people remember it. They have a better feeling for you and are more likely to hire you, befriend you, marry you, trust you, buy from you, and just about anything else with you. Most people get zero compliments during a normal day. If you're the one who breaks that streak, you will be remembered in a positive way.

But what's the downside?

In America, at the time of this writing, the downside is that any compliment from a male over the age of twelve can be construed as suspicious, especially in a work environment. Your culture might be different. I trust you to know when a compliment is appropriate. Outside the workplace, the risk of complimenting a person is low. I've been complimenting people my entire life, and I don't recall a negative outcome. It's one of the lowest-risk ways to get "free money" that this reality offers. And by free money, I mean you give people a good feeling about you.

Usual Frame: Giving compliments is awkward, creepy, or manipulative.

Reframe: Withholding a compliment is almost immoral.

Life can be challenging for even the luckiest among us. One unexpected compliment can turn someone's day around. And it costs you nothing to deliver your little verbal bouquet of niceness. If you have a positive thought about someone, let it out.

But don't be weird about it. I favor the drop-and-leave approach, which I encourage you to borrow. It involves dropping a thick compliment and immediately changing the subject before your target has a chance to feel awkward or even respond. If you compliment and then linger on the topic, your target will either feel awkward or act humble and deny the truth of it. When you

do the drop-and-leave method, the compliment is delivered, and no one has time to feel awkward. Mission accomplished. Only use the drop-and-leave when you don't know the person well enough to know how they will take a compliment. Someone you know well, such as your spouse, might want you to linger after a compliment, maybe suss out some details, view it from multiple angles—that sort of thing. You'll know when to linger.

DISCOVERING YOUR SEX APPEAL

If you are universally attractive, you won't need this reframe. But most of us could use some help.

Usual Frame: No one seems to find me attractive.

Reframe: I haven't met enough people.

Instead of thinking about the 90 percent of people who are not attracted to your type (just to pick a number), think about the 10 percent who are. In my case, that means women who prefer smart men who are not likely to play in the NBA. If I meet a hundred women, maybe ten will care about my mind more than my appearance, age, or whatever. That's a lot.

If settling for 10 percent sounds like a weak consolation prize, consider that even the most popular musical acts in the world are enjoyed by no more than 10 percent of the global public. If you can make 10 percent of the public like you —for any reason—you're going to be rich. That's how I got rich with the *Dilbert* comic. About 10 percent of the public likes it. That's all I needed to become one of the most successful comic strip creators in history.

Your best strategy for attracting people for romance is to work hard on your fitness and diet. If you get those right, you'll be one of the most attractive people in your environment, especially after the age of thirty. A woman once told me that any man with a job and a gym membership is already in the top 20 percent of desirable men. You can move to the top 10 percent by focusing on your fitness and your fashion—and by fixing your haircut.

The power of the 10 percent strategy is that it tells you exactly what to do if things aren't working out for you in the romance department: Meet more people. That's the whole strategy. Doesn't matter how you do it. Play a sport, join a club, change jobs, whatever it takes. If you increase the number of people who know you, your odds of finding a match go way up. So forget about being attractive to everyone. Just use math to solve your problem: Meet more people any way you can.

My understanding is that dating apps only work for some types of people—generally the better-looking amongst us. As an unattractive person, I can confirm that no one ever asked to meet me because of my looks. But in person, I can present myself in a better light. Most people reading this book are in the same boat. The solution is to add more people to that boat so your odds of meeting someone the organic way are higher.

That said, meeting new people isn't enough. You also need to signal some genetic advantages to get yourself a date.

Usual Frame: I need to go find someone to be my romantic partner.

Reframe: I need to signal my genetic advantages to attract a romantic partner.

Combining the two reframes in this chapter, your best strategy is to meet new people in a way that allows you to show off your skills, which translates in the minds of others to genetic advantages. And genetic advantages are what trigger people into wanting to mate with you. For example, if you're good at sports, join a co-ed sports team. If you're a good musician, find a way to perform in public, including playing the piano at a party, for example.

You don't need a whole basket of obvious genetic advantages to attract a mate. Consider a rock star who has musical ability but is a loser in every other way. That guy has plenty of mating opportunities because the musical talent registers as a genetic advantage, even if it was nothing more than an average natural ability boosted by practice alone.

If you're looking for an easy starting point for meeting new people, join a gym and work on your fitness. If you build some muscles and lose some fat, and enough people see your *apparent* genetic advantages, your odds of finding a romantic partner go way up.

DECIDING WHERE TO EAT

I have no idea if things work differently in the LGBTQ+ community when negotiating where to eat, but to keep the writing simple, I'll describe a generic straight couple who frankly bore me.

There are two things a woman wants in a man:

1. A decisive man who takes charge.
2. Total dominion over dining decisions.

As you can imagine, this daily recurring nightmare causes a problem for a hungry man. He must make a dining decision via the process of taking charge while also not doing anything of the sort. If the man approaches this trap as a *decision* that must be made between two willing parties, he will be doomed to frustration. But if that clever man reframes the situation, it will be easy to navigate it.

Usual Frame: I'm trying to make a dining decision with a crazy person. Please shoot me.

Reframe: It's not about food. It's about the illusion of control.

Here's how the man in this situation can solve the problem of taking charge and *not* taking charge at the same time: He can offer two restaurant choices—presumably out of many—and ask his partner to pick one. Narrowing the choices to two solves the "taking charge" part because it shows initiative while also providing some choice—but not too much—to his partner. Barry Schwartz, author of *The Paradox of Choice*, tells us that people become unhappy if they have too many options. The more options you have, the more likely you will be filled with self-doubt about whether you chose correctly. And I observe that to be the case. Whenever people have too many options, they get stressed out. If you don't believe me, look at the faces of diners who are going to the Cheesecake Factory for the first time. The menu is the size of a dictionary. No one appears to be happy when they're looking at it.

Okay, I know the imaginary woman in my example will reject both restaurant choices. But she will probably also make her own suggestion at that point, and the clever man accepts it immediately. Problem solved: The woman observes the man taking charge and doing something useful—narrowing the choices to two. Then when the woman rejects both choices and suggests one she would like instead, she also gets the dining option of her choice. The man gets a win for taking initiative, and he typically doesn't care too much where he ends up eating. Everyone wins.

Framing the situation as a question of control instead of a food decision opens new options for a solution, including tweaking the decision-making process by narrowing the choices to two. In contrast, framing the struggle as trying to make a rational dining decision with an irrational partner doesn't give you much to work with.

Before you start emailing me, I am aware that not all people are alike and that you are especially awesome and easy to work with. But I think more than a few

readers of this book are living this dining-decision nightmare and will be happy to try my reframe.

If you find yourself on the receiving end of a "Where do you want to eat?" question, you need a different reframe. You might think that not hogging the decision to yourself is a polite position to take. But it probably isn't because the asker might have wanted to share responsibility with someone for the decision. Not much good can come from, "I don't care."

A better way to frame that situation is that the asker wants a copilot for the decision, and nothing will happen until that position is filled. Here is the reframe.

Usual Frame: I need a decision.

Reframe: I need a copilot to share the blame.

My mother taught me this reframe. Sometimes it isn't about the choice. Sometimes it's about finding a way to move forward. Never say you don't care; just choose. Everyone will be glad you did, and you will appear to be a leader. If someone doesn't like your choice, they'll probably let you know.

Of all the reframes in this book, the dining decision reframe has the most universal application. Most of us deal with the "Where do you want to eat?" trap. You'll be amazed how well this solves it.

These reframes work for any choice in which your honest answer would be "I don't care." It isn't limited to food. The method can work in a variety of professional and personal situations.

The first time you try one of these reframes, you will probably silently thank me in your mind. And I will silently say, "You're welcome" because I can sense these things.

WANT TO GO TO LUNCH WITH TINA AND ME?
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A NIGHTMARE. WE WOULD ALL STARVE BEFORE AGREEING ON A PLACE TO EAT.
ARE YOU IN?
YES, BECAUSE FOR SOME REASON, I NEVER LEARN.
CONTINUED...
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12-12-22

HOUR ONE: DECIDING WHERE TO EAT LUNCH
OKAY, WE NEED A VEGAN, KETO RESTAURANT WITH NO GLUTEN
AND IT NEEDS TO BE WITHIN LIMPING DISTANCE BECAUSE TINA HAS A BAD FOOT.
THAT NARROWS IT DOWN TO... NOTHING.
WHAT IF YOU CARRY HER?
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12-13-22
HOUR TWO: DECIDING WHERE TO EAT LUNCH
WE'VE NARROWED DOWN THE CHOICES TO...
...A PLACE THAT IS TOO BUSY FOR US TO GET A TABLE AND A PLACE THAT USED TO EXIST BUT FOR SOME REASON NO LONGER DOES.
THEY CAN'T BE OUR ONLY CHOICES.
NO, WE ALSO HAVE THREE PLACES THAT ARE TOO FAR AWAY.
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12-14-22

HUMOR

If you are not naturally funny, wouldn't it be nice to know how to create humor? Everyone likes a good laugh.

Most humor comes from referencing a known pattern and then violating that pattern in a clever and surprising way. For example, when characters act against their stereotypes—a common humor formula—the stereotypes are the pattern being violated. An example would be a cute bunny rabbit that is also a deadly assassin.

Standup comics often create jokes by first describing what one group of people can get away with in society, then violating the pattern with "imagine me trying that." For example, the comic might describe some bad behavior a celebrity allegedly got away with and follow with an "imagine if" story in which the comic tries the same behavior as the celebrity, but it doesn't work out.

In movies, a common plot device is the "fish out of water." That's another way to say a quirky character is dropped into a situation for which they are not equipped, and hilarity ensues. That too is a form of pattern violation that creates humor.

People who don't write jokes for a living often describe humor as "bad things happening to other people" or "tragedy plus time" or simply a matter of "surprise." But that level of description doesn't help you write your own jokes, which is what I want for you. You might find it helpful to reframe humor as pattern violation because that gives you a starting point for writing a joke about anything.

Here's the humor reframe.

Usual Frame: The usual patterns hold (non-humor).

Reframe: The usual patterns are violated (humor).

You get extra energy from a joke if the pattern you are violating is one in which the people in power—or polite society in general—don't want violated. That's why it's so easy to write jokes about a cop who doesn't follow the rules, the lawyer who can't lie for his client, the doctor with the unpleasant bedside personality, or the soulmate who is a monster. If you start with a pattern violation, writing the jokes that go with it is easy.

Pattern violation isn't the only way to write humor, but the other methods don't give you such an obvious starting point. Just ask yourself what is the most common and expected way for a given character—your coworkers, your family, professionals, anyone—to act and see what happens if they do the opposite. It's usually funny before you even write the joke.

Do you remember a story about a mail carrier who was taking home all the mail he was supposed to be delivering? That's funny from the start because he did the opposite of delivering the mail. He violated the mail carrier pattern.

You can also create humor by calling out a common pattern of human behavior that no one has yet mentioned. Recently, a friend mentioned the angst of discovering a hole in one sock and feeling guilty for even considering discarding the surviving sock simply because it no longer had a partner. If you have ever had that sock-empathy thought, you probably laughed. Topics that are familiar to you but not already picked over by comedians will work best.

As you see from the examples, you can create humor by OBSERVING human patterns—and calling them out—or by VIOLATING human patterns. If you're using the *observing* method, you can generally only refuel your creativity in an accidental way—by noticing something in your normal day. If you take the approach of *violating a pattern*, you automatically have a starting point and the germ of an idea for how to proceed.

Side Note: Pattern violation is also one of the top recommendations for making memorable presentations. If you have a theme for your slides, violate

the theme on the slide that is the one you most want your audience to remember. Pattern violations—like a stain on a white tablecloth—capture your attention, and that's exactly what you need to create memories and have impact.

Weirdly, the other most common way to create humor is by writing characters who are acting exactly as you would expect if you were a bigot of some sort. For example, the *Dilbert* comic character is an engineer, so you would expect him to act a certain way because you are a bigot—you assume he is a socially awkward geek. I can get away with gentle mocking of engineers because I revere them, and I'm a professional humorist who knows where the boundaries are. You probably don't want to target any group to which you do not belong. And even if you are part of that group, it's probably better to play it safe.

Imagine the next person you encounter doing exactly the opposite of what their personality would suggest. It will probably make you laugh. And now you know how to create humor.

MARRIAGE

We like to think of love as the process of finding a soulmate. That's a fun, romantic way to frame it. But realistically, humans can fall in love with whoever is nearby and willing (within reason). And we do, for better or for worse.

But a new view of marriage is gaining traction in some circles. By this view, marriage is about finding someone who AGREES to be your partner and protector for life. Obviously, you want to be compatible in all the ways you can, but the highest priority in this new model is the ***promise you make to each other***, not the love, and not the soulmate part.

You want to have love, and you want to feel your partner is your soulmate. But romantic love and lust have a way of fading over time, no matter how diligent you are about keeping things fresh. Promises are different. A promise kept for a long time becomes more valuable, not less. And a promise to look after each other until death do you part is the ultimate valuable thing for a human. Look for a partner you can love, but on top of that, make sure you find someone who values a promise.

Usual Frame: Marriage is about finding your soul mate.

Reframe: Marriage is about finding love with someone who values promises.

As my critics delight in noting, I'm the last person who should be giving marriage advice. I'm zero-for-two in that department. I have sufficient self-

awareness to recommend you avoid whatever I was doing. But this might be a situation in which my overclocked self-esteem can help you. I'll tell you the reframe I use to excuse my own marriage failures. It can help you, too. It goes like this.

Usual Frame: Marriage is a great system, so if your marriage fails, that means one or both of you messed up.

Reframe: So many marriages ending in divorce proves that marriage is a poorly designed system.

To be clear, marriage is a *great* system for some percentage of the general population. I don't think that percentage is greater than 25 percent or so, based on my lifetime of observation. People are different. We wouldn't thrive in the same jobs, the same sports, or even the same weather. We don't like the same music, food, or pets. It should be no surprise that the institution of marriage fits some people perfectly while failing others.

Monogamous marriage-for-life is a pre-Internet system and mainstay of human civilization for quite some time. During its glory days, traditional marriage made sense because men and women brought different things to the marriage—things the other could not easily provide. But in the age of equality, every individual can handle a solo life without that much special effort. No mate needed. For that group, marriage is ***designed*** to fail. And by that I mean a spouse will generally, over time, start to look worse than a coworker, friend, or almost anyone else. Everyone but your spouse has the advantage of being able to show only their good side. Spouses don't have that option. That's why they can't compete.

Marriage would work better if people didn't have easy Internet access to alternatives, but they do. The system guarantees that a couple will start to look increasingly flawed to each other while serving up unlimited mating alternatives—and worse—endless love stories of fictional people who are happily married and always romantic.

I often advise "follow the money" when trying to predict anything. With marriage, there can often be financial incentives to divorce, especially for the person who brings the least financial strength to the marriage. If one partner can leave a suboptimal marriage and take a good chunk of money, and maybe get an automatic babysitter during the shared custody years, that makes divorce feel like a practical option, if not desirable. I don't believe many people divorce for money alone, but "follow the money" predicts better than you wish it would. Be realistic if you plan to take a marriage path. That's all I suggest.

BREAKUPS

If you live a normal life, you will probably experience several breakups. They will hurt. I have some experience in this domain and can share my most effective reframes. Realistically, time is the only healer, but you might be able to handle the recovery better with some useful reframes.

Usual Frame: I want my relationship to last forever.

Reframe: Nothing lasts forever.

Best case scenario, you spend your lives together until one of you watches the other die of age-related problems. Life is not designed to give you a happy ending. And nothing lasts forever. As awful as this sounds—and it is awful—the sooner you embrace doom as inevitable, the sooner you can stop worrying if things will work out for you in the end. In the long run, all businesses will fail, all governments get replaced, and all humans expire. If humans did not experience loss, we would have no capacity for joy. And you and I want joy.

Here's another reframe I found useful.

Usual Frame: This breakup ends my hopes for happiness.

Reframe: There are happier third marriages than first.

I have no idea if that is true, and I don't plan to research it because accuracy is not an active ingredient in reframes. Anecdotally, people in their third marriages do seem happier, and that's good enough for me. If you have never observed that pattern, perhaps this reframe is not for you. But if you have, tell yourself the relationship you are leaving was practice. The odds of getting the right relationship pairing on the first try or even the first several are low. But the odds of finding one of your million-or-so best potential matches in the long run are good.

Breakups can signal the beginning of hard times. But just as often, and perhaps more often, the freedom you gain from a breakup starts to pay off right away. You will rediscover some of your favorite activities, have more time to work on fitness and your career, and still upgrade your relationship in time. Don't rush it.

Here's a reframe that captures all of that.

Usual Frame: I have lost my soulmate.

Reframe: I have a million soulmates I have not yet met.

Not counting online dating, the main place people meet and fall in love is in the workplace. What are the odds that you and your soulmate ended up working for the same company? The obvious explanation is that humans can fall in love with a variety of people. If you are experiencing a breakup, you are not losing your soulmate. At worst, you are losing one of your million-or-so soulmates.

One of the best reframes for surviving a lost love comes from Dr. Seuss. It shifts your focus away from wallowing in your own pity to how lucky you were to have experienced that human connection in the first place. It's easy to lose sight of that.

Usual Frame: I am crying because my relationship ended.

Reframe: "Don't cry because it is over, smile because it happened." — Dr. Seuss

My closing advice for this topic is to talk to people who are delighted they broke up with their exes. They're easy to find. Most recently divorced people fall into that category. When you're in the middle of your breakup recovery period, feeling happy again can seem impossible. All those now-happy people thought something similar. Learn something from their numbers.

TALKING TO TEENAGERS

If you are an adult with teens in your home, you have experienced the joy of trying to reason with them. This generally devolves into you-against-them in a power dynamic that turns into shouting and tears and bad feelings that can last days. The teen sometimes has some impact as well.

One solution you might try involves explaining to the teen that everyone starts life with a young brain, including the two of you. If people are lucky, they live long enough to have an old brain that is past its expiration date. Somewhere in the middle are the people most capable of making decisions, and that's where the parent happens to be. You wouldn't want to ignore biology; human brains are at their best somewhere in the middle of a person's lifespan, not at either end.

Great power comes with great responsibility—to paraphrase Spider-Man—so it's your job to keep the teen safe and on the right track, and you take your responsibility seriously. That's why *you* are making the decisions, not the teen.

There's a reason Americans can't run for president until age thirty-five. When it comes to life-and-death decisions, we want the best brains on our side. Without getting political, there is a good reason citizen are concerned when

their president is over age seventy-five. Beyond that age, citizens can't be sure what we're getting.

That's the little speech I used with my stepson. Obviously, he never changed his mind about what he wanted and why, but he understood my reasoning and had no counter to it. That's why we got along. I never made it personal, and I carefully explained why it was in his best interest—like it or not—to do what I asked or advised him to do. I also never tried to give him advice in a domain he knew better than I did—such as snowboarding—to keep my story consistent about who should be making decisions. Had we gone snowboarding together, I would have followed his lead within reason because that was his domain. Here's what it looks like as a reframe.

Usual Frame: A teen can't understand the "reason" parents have given, and it turns into a power struggle.

Reframe: The parent is a guide for young brains that are not yet capable of understanding adult reasons.

Here's another reframe that can take energy out of the you-versus-them dynamic. Frame the issue as you being responsible for the teen's future self, not the current version of the teen.

Usual Frame: I'm talking to you, teen, and this is between us.

Reframe: I must answer to your future self, not your current self.

The idea is to reframe the conversation as you siding with the teen's future self against the current teen whose brain is not yet developed, and I recommend explaining it that way to the teen. That way, it's two against one. Tell the teen you're raising them to become a successful and happy adult, and that adult will someday hold you responsible for what you do to their teen self. When the teen says (and they always do), "I don't understand why you are making me do this!" you can simply answer that their future self will thank you for not taking the advice of a minor with a half-baked noodle for a brain. This framing allows you to take sides with the teen—albeit their future self—against the current version of the teen who has not yet developed risk management skills. If I tell you I'm siding with future you, not present you, it's a bit of a mind-bender. It's hard to feel anger toward someone who is taking your side more aggressively than you are.

By the way, this is an example of embrace-and-amplify persuasion, in which you take the teen's side more completely than they take it themselves. They

want to maximize their today selves, usually in some fleeting and selfish way, whereas you are maximizing their entire lives.

The key to making this reframe work is to remove all emotion from it. Keep insisting the teen's future self will be happy you acted the way you are and agree with the teen when they say they "don't understand" why you are being the way you are. Tell them that's exactly your point—that they don't yet have the capacity to understand their long-term best interests, but their future self will. And you answer to their future self—the complete person—not the half-done version.

Full disclosure, this might be the weakest reframe in the book, but it might work better than whatever-the-heck you were doing. Don't expect any conversation with teens to end in hugs and gratitude. Teens are still teens. But you might be able to use the reframe to detach your emotions from the situation, and that can keep a lid on how heated things get.

Oh, and you probably shouldn't use the term "half-baked noodle" when talking to a teen. Throw in some adult words such as maturity, fully developed, and even actuarial tables if you want to be a showoff. Read the room.

That said, if you're only in it for your entertainment, wait for the inevitable teen complaint of "I don't understand why …" and reply with "That's exactly my point. If you *could* understand this situation in full, it would mean you were ready to make decisions without me. I love you. Do your homework and go to bed, you rascal."

WHO HAS THE POWER

I often hear people talk about themselves as powerless pawns in a cruel world. They see power coming from the government, police, their bosses, and even their spouses. But power is a tricky thing, and we often see it backwards. Examples will help my point.

Is an elected politician in charge, or are the voters? You can imagine it both ways. It depends on the specifics, but voters are never powerless. Neither are politicians.

Is your boss in charge, or are you? It depends how hard it would be to replace you. A top engineer in a technical firm probably has more clout than a mid-level boss.

Now let's say you meet someone for the first time and the encounter does not go well. Perhaps the new person is rude or disrespectful. Maybe they are

refusing to be helpful in ways you'd expect any decent person to be. In these cases, are you being controlled by the stranger?

It feels as if your mood and the quality of your day will be altered by how this stranger treats you. That gives the stranger a lot of power over you. If you accept the frame that the other person's actions and attitude will influence you, then they will. But you don't have to accept that frame. You have a better option.

Usual Frame: People treat you poorly, and you can't do much about it.

Reframe: You cause people to act the way they do.

I first discovered this reframe in college. I noticed a weird pattern I could not immediately explain. Whenever I was relaxed, people treated me better. When I was angry or stressed, others seemed to treat me poorly more often than I liked. For years, I believed I had been observing a false pattern that I only imagined. Surely there is no physical mechanism that could make other people nicer just because I was feeling relaxed. I couldn't imagine how that would work.

Then I got smarter. Some call it experience.

Eventually, I realized that when I was relaxed and happy, I turned others into a version of me. They would smile more, engage more, and generally enjoy the encounter. Once I understood how compatible this view is with science, I reframed my subjective reality as one in which I influence everyone I meet, but they barely influence me.

Is that true? Not exactly. It would be more accurate to say we influence each other. But truth and logic do not matter for reframes. It only matters that you get what you want. And this reframe works fabulously for me because it reminds me to actively "change" the other person into what I need them to be. And what I usually need people to be is nice to me. That's all. Nothing special. Just be respectful and kind. Most people want to be respectful, kind, and happy, so in my opinion, it's ethical to persuade them to be more of that.

These days, I define myself as the author of my own experience regarding how others treat me, not a victim of their whims. In truth, I am both. But I frame it in a way that makes me feel the best.

You probably know the Bible story of David and Goliath, in which smallish David slays the "giant" Goliath using nothing but a sling and some stones. What they don't normally tell you about the story is that shepherds were both accurate and lethal with slings, and they didn't need to be within stabbing distance to kill. In other words, David was the powerful character in the story,

not the underdog. The story generally gets told the other way around. Humans have a habit of confusing who has the power in any given situation.

We imagine our bosses—if we have bosses—hold power over us. And that is clearly true. But if you want a quick education in how much power a boss really has, try being one. You'll instantly realize how hard it is to fire someone and hire someone better. Now pile on the legal protections afforded to employees in modern times. Then top that off with a frosting of so-called "wokeness" and see how much power the boss has. Now pack your schedule so you barely have time to apply any power to any specific situation. Now give that boss a spouse, two kids, a dog, and a cat.

If you go by the job descriptions alone, a boss has all the power. But in the real world, whenever someone is happily paying another for some sort of service, they are often closer to a tie in power. It might be 60-40 in favor of the boss, but 40 isn't nothing.

We all have more power than we think. You can't view your own power accurately because it's nearly impossible to fully appreciate the impact you have on other people. Some examples will help make the point.

When the COVID pandemic broke out in 2020, the Trump administration put out the word to various smart people that the administration was open to ideas for Executive Orders—written commands a president signs to get things done outside the normal lawmaking process. I had some glancing knowledge of the telehealth business because of a recent startup experience, so I suggested an Executive Order allowing telehealth calls across state lines, which was until then not allowed. During a pandemic, this was an obvious rule to change. I reasoned that it would work well for the public and doctors alike and be hard to reverse. A few weeks later, President Trump signed the Executive Order—based on my suggestion that worked its way up through the channels—and a major impediment to reducing healthcare costs disappeared. So who had the "power" in that situation, the President of the United States or … me? I would argue that I had the power because the idea was so obviously a good one. And that's my point: The person with the best ideas is always in charge. It might not seem like it. But they are.

How do I know that? Because I've been in countless business situations in which the best idea wins the day. It doesn't matter who has what job description. If your idea is the best of the bunch under consideration, you're in charge.

Usual Frame: The boss is in charge.

Reframe: The person with the best ideas is in charge.

Why did seventeen-year-old Greta Thunberg have so much influence on the climate agenda? I'd say it's because she did the best job of communicating. That's another way to grab power from the bottom—be the best at communicating something the masses want to hear. You'd be shocked and appalled if you knew how much power a political speechwriter has. That's a dirty little secret of politics; speechwriters have great influence on policy because if it sounds good when spoken, a politician wants to say it. That means a speechwriter can easily bias a speech by making the catchiest parts support their worldview.

Usual Frame: The experts are in charge.

Reframe: The best communicator is in charge.

Another source of power is competence. If you're the most competent person in each meeting and that fact becomes apparent to others, suddenly you're in charge, like it or not. Being competent is an extreme superpower. Everyone wants to hire you, work with you, promote you, buy from you, have babies with you, and be your friend. We are drawn to the competent, and that gives them power.

Usual Frame: The boss is in charge.

Reframe: The most capable people are in charge.

On the downside, competent people end up doing most of the work. That must be why so many people avoid being competent.

Here's a reframe that can help you identify powerful influencers before anyone else sees them coming. You can think of power in the modern world as the product of persuasion talent multiplied by the size of your audience. If you are persuasive but no one is listening, that won't help anyone. And if you have a big audience but no persuasion training, you are squandering an opportunity. When you see both—as we observed with both Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and candidate Donald Trump in 2016—you can easily predict they will have a big impact.

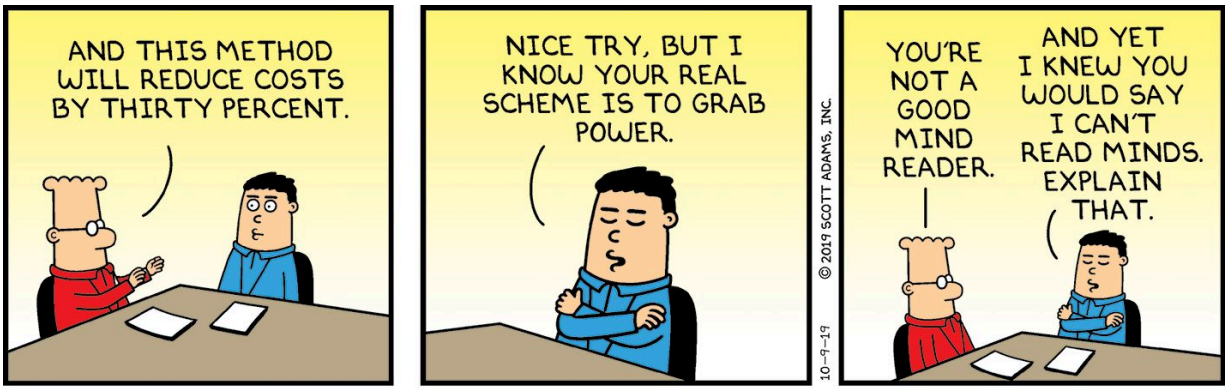
Usual Frame: The people in charge have the power.

Reframe: Power = (Persuasion skill) x (Audience size)

Now that you've been exposed to a few examples of power illusions, you might find it easier to spot misleading power dynamics on your own. My

default belief in every situation is that I'm the one with the power. I recommend you start with that assumption, too.

MIND-READING ISN'T REAL


AND THIS METHOD WILL REDUCE COSTS BY THIRTY PERCENT.
NICE TRY, BUT I KNOW YOUR REAL SCHEME IS TO GRAB POWER.
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10-9-19
YOU'RE NOT A GOOD MIND READER.
AND YET I KNEW YOU WOULD SAY I CAN'T READ MINDS. EXPLAIN THAT.

If you have ever experienced something called "a relationship," you know even the people closest to you can't tell what you're thinking much of the time. And if you have experienced the horrors of using social media, you know strangers routinely assign secret motives and nutty opinions to you.

Have you ever been accused of thinking something you were not thinking? Of course you have. It's a daily occurrence for some of us. As a public figure, I'm falsely accused of having terrible motives every day. Literally every day. This gives me a privileged view of how bad people are at discerning others' motives based on scant clues.

When I watch Bill Gates get involved with the most pressing issues of our time, I think he's trying to help. My assessment of his motives is that he took care of all his own needs and those of his family, so he is turning outward to help "the tribe," which in this case is all of humankind. I see Gates taking on the nastiest, most intractable problems of our time at great personal cost and risk. So to me, he appears to have good motives. Obviously, his philanthropy also gives him cover—in a physical security sense as well as reputationally—so one could argue his self-interest is the prime motivator. I see his actions as 100 percent compatible with his self-interest and well-intentioned.

Am I right about Gates? I don't know. I can't read minds.

Other people look at the same set of facts about Bill Gates and conclude he is running some sort of global money-making scheme that involves scaring the public to boost his pharma and nuclear investments, to gain control of the world to turn us all into masked and sterilized slaves full of fake DNA, or something like that.

I probably succeeded in convincing you that other people—including me—are bad at discerning the motives of strangers. But you might still think *you* are good at it. And that's the problem. We all believe we are. At this very moment, I'm writing a book that tells you people are bad at mind reading, and I know that to be true. I also know that several times today I will imagine incorrect motives in the minds of strangers. My only defense is the reframe I keep in my mind and often repeat.

Usual Frame: I can discern people's motives by their actions.

Reframe: Mind-reading isn't real. Humans are terrible at discerning motives.

This reframe is more powerful than it seems. Once you tune your brain to spot instances of "mind-reading" by others, you can push back on their arguments by reminding people that humans don't know how to read minds. In my experience, people retreat from their absurd accusations about you when you call out their inability to read minds. You might still have to explain your real motives, but it helps to do a controlled burn of your critic's magical thinking about mind-reading before you tell them what you are really thinking. Try it.

BASKET CASE THEORY

Sometimes it feels as if everyone I know believes they are weird (and they are) while they also believe most people are non-weird (they are wrong). I call this the Basket Case Theory. Most of us feel as if we're hiding a secret when we're around so-called normal people because we don't feel we are normal, so surely others will notice.

I first learned of Basket Case Theory from a friend and tennis partner when I was in my twenties. The original context was our dating experiences. We kept meeting normal women who would, over time, slowly reveal their hidden traumas and anxieties until we came to see them as Basket Cases (a term denoting someone with debilitating mental and emotional issues). In time, I came to see Basket Case Theory as a useful description of all humans, male and female.

Usual Frame: Most people are normal, but I'm a basket case.

Reframe: Everyone is a basket case once you get to know them.

Basket Case Theory has a lot of utility. It keeps you from getting too starry-eyed about a new relationship until you see what horrors are in the basket. You

start to develop realistic expectations of other people, which can prevent disappointment. It also gives you permission to be one of the basket cases yourself since the whole idea is that no one is exempt.

Sure, you're a weirdo. But so am I, and so is everyone else we know, albeit in different ways. That's a healthy place to be mentally. It can crush your self-esteem to imagine people around you as healthy and happy and awesome, but you're not. It should ease your mind to realize that once you get to know others well, their problems are ones you wouldn't want. We are a civilization of basket cases pretending to be otherwise. You won't find an exception. At best, you might find someone who doesn't complain too much. I've searched my entire life for the one complete person who hits all the right notes and feels all the right feelings. As far as I can tell, that person is hiding or does not exist. And I take comfort in that. I don't mind being a weirdo in the land of weirdos. It's only uncomfortable to be a weirdo if you think others are not.

(*Pssst*. They are.)

I have a unique window into the basket case phenomenon because I am older than most readers of this book, so I've seen the unbroken pattern for decades. I also have the type of job that signals to people I'm open-minded and non-judgy. That means people tell me everything. Even when I don't want them to. People confess all manner of crimes to me (serious ones), and they know they're safe to do so. They also confess their deepest desires and mental issues because, again, they're safe to do so. I start with the basket case assumption about everyone, so any details I learn about a person won't change my opinion.

Take it from me: Everyone is a basket case. Some can hide it better than others. It's a deeply freeing concept.

JUDGING OTHERS BY THEIR MISTAKES

I already showed you how to make yourself immune to the criticisms of strangers. Now it's time to learn how to be less critical of others, for the social benefits, but also to protect your mental health.

When others make mistakes that complicate our lives, our most common reaction is anger at the offender. At the same time, we know everyone makes mistakes for all manner of reasons we don't understand at the time. If we use that standard to judge others, it will keep us busy hating half the people we meet. Worse, you might automatically apply the same standard to yourself and end up baking a big ol' self-hatred cake. No one wants a self-hatred cake.

Rather than judge others by their mistakes, I recommend a different standard: Judge people by how they *respond* to their mistakes. That's a standard you can hold yourself to with some chance of success.

Usual Frame: Judge people by their mistakes.

Reframe: Judge people by how they respond to their mistakes.

When you observe someone handle their mistakes with confidence and empathy, fully acknowledging any harm done, you're seeing the best a person can do. We can't expect people to be error-free. But we can certainly ask them to handle their mistakes with class.

When a person handles their mistakes well, you instinctively trust them. And you probably should. If you want to be trusted in your own life, that's a great model to follow. Make your mistakes, apologize if needed, and announce your plan for avoiding the same mistake in the future. People will notice.

LATENESS

Do you know anyone whose lateness is so epic that it defies all explanation? If you ask why they're late, they might offer reasonable explanations such as traffic delays or some hold-up at work. But over time, you notice the same people are always late while others are nearly always on time. That's probably not a coincidence.

What's up with that?

You probably assume the always-late person in your life is incompetent or uncaring or both. But I'll bet you can rule out uncaring because the lateness almost certainly applies when no one pays the price but the perpetrator. And you can probably rule out ordinary incompetence because people of all capabilities can be either habitually late or punctual.

I was baffled by the phenomenon of the always-late until I heard an expert explain that people with ADHD are not "distracted" as we commonly believe; they have *time blindness*. They live in the now, meaning they act on the most interesting or critical thing in their immediate surroundings instead of doing what they need to do to satisfy their future hopes and plans. They are blind to the existence of their future selves whenever they're in the moment.

For contrast, I'm generally on time for everything. I also have an ability to visualize imaginary futures in such vivid detail that they influence my immediate actions. When I do the right things in the present, I see my

imaginary future take shape the way I'd like it. You could say I live in the future. Intentionally. Here's the reframe.

Usual Frame: People who are always late are either incompetent or uncaring or both.

Reframe: Some people have time blindness.

The value of this reframe is that it changes how you feel about the always-late person. Perhaps it helps them understand themselves, too. The lateness isn't personal if it happens in every context. My experience with the always-late agrees with the experts. No amount of better planning or incentives helps the always-late because they are not intentionally late; they are oblivious to the future. It isn't personal. It's just how they're wired. You will have to adapt if you want them in your life. They would adapt to you if they could.

That said, people are different, and I suspect a gifted hypnotist could help an always-late person develop a habit that supports punctuality. The trick would be to add some sort of trigger that can happen in the "now" to connect an always-late person to their schedule and timeline.

I have a lifelong habit of never being out of sight of a clock or my phone when I'm getting ready for anything. I check the time reflexively every five minutes or so and micro-adjust my schedule as I go. I doubt the always-late impose clocks on themselves as aggressively as the always-punctual. But it might be a habit that could be developed, perhaps with help.

One of the most useful ways to view human behavior is that we are just as trainable as dogs. No offense intended to dogs. If you get a reward for a thing and repeat that pattern, you build a subconscious habit. This is true for any animal, including you. For example, some dog owners teach their dogs to make eye contact on a regular basis while walking together to "check in." You do this by giving the dog a treat for randomly looking in your direction until the behavior locks in. Once it locks in, it becomes a habit outside the dog's conscious control. In effect, you reprogrammed the dog.

Now imagine a human with a smartwatch and an app with an avatar of your choice that does nothing but compliment you and remind you to stay on task whenever you check the time. Everyone likes compliments, even from machines. That's why video games give you rewards for achievements and slot machines make happy noises for jackpots. Those are forms of compliments, or affirmations, and they're addicting. If you could create an addiction for checking your smartwatch—to get your reward every five minutes—then it reminded you to get back on task, would that make you less late?

I don't know. It probably depends on the individual and the quality of the app. If you want to be late less often, or if you want to help someone else in that situation, I recommend experimenting to see if you can form an addiction to some sort of reminder that can become a subconscious habit.

The "poor man's" version of this would involve complimenting yourself every time you look at a timepiece, as in, "You are so smart," or whatever doesn't sound weird to your ear. Start by doing your micro affirmation no matter the reason you notice the time, even if you only saw a clock in your visual field by chance.

Ideally, you want your compliment to yourself to be something you would naturally be reminded of in your daily actions. "Smart" works well because we're always judging our actions as smart or not. Over time and with repetition, anything that makes you think of your own intelligence or that of anyone else should trigger a reflex to check the time.

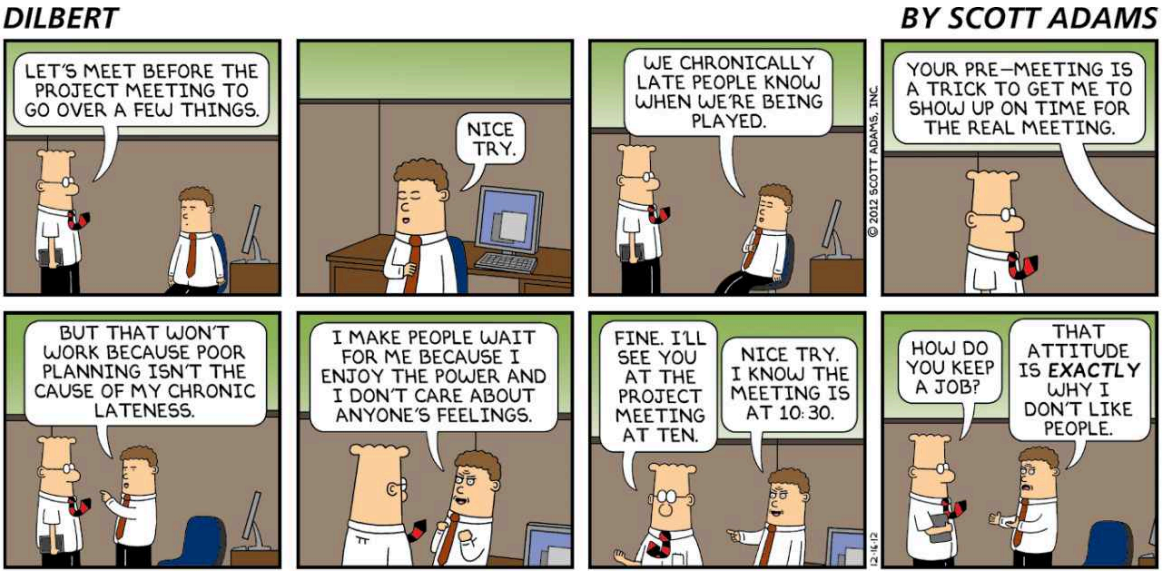
I am writing this at Starbucks near my home, and I have reflexively checked their clock a dozen times … and they don't have a clock. But my brain wants the clock to be right above the service bar. So I keep looking for it, by habit, about every five minutes. I don't have a lateness problem, and you can see why.

I doubt ADHD—or whatever causes future blindness—can be cured by subtraction, as in making it disappear. I think your best bet is to add habits—like software patches—to tame it.

I had one stepdaughter who got ready for school as soon as she awakened and used the extra half-hour before the drive to her campus for personal entertainment. Her sister did the reverse—she sought entertainment when she woke up and got ready for school just before she needed to leave. Guess which kid was on time every day and which was often late.

Having a good system for being on time matters. Perhaps a hypnotist or counselor of some sort could help an always-late patient build such a system.

Your so-called common sense might tell you that fixing lateness in another person or even in yourself should be easy. In practice, it might be one of the hardest traits to rewire. I've described some low-effort hacks that might help. What have you got to lose?


DILBERT
BY SCOTT ADAMS
LET'S MEET BEFORE THE PROJECT MEETING TO GO OVER A FEW THINGS.
NICE TRY.
WE CHRONICALLY LATE PEOPLE KNOW WHEN WE'RE BEING PLAYED.
YOUR PRE-MEETING IS A TRICK TO GET ME TO SHOW UP ON TIME FOR THE REAL MEETING.
© 2012 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
BUT THAT WON'T WORK BECAUSE POOR PLANNING ISN'T THE CAUSE OF MY CHRONIC LATENESS.
I MAKE PEOPLE WAIT FOR ME BECAUSE I ENJOY THE POWER AND I DON'T CARE ABOUT ANYONE'S FEELINGS.
FINE. I'LL SEE YOU AT THE PROJECT MEETING AT TEN.
NICE TRY. I KNOW THE MEETING IS AT 10:30.
HOW DO YOU KEEP A JOB?
THAT ATTITUDE IS EXACTLY WHY I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE.
12-16-12

ACTS OF KINDNESS

A quote of mine on kindness from years ago recently went viral. It, too, is a reframe: "Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end."

Usual Frame: Small acts of kindness are good.

Reframe: There are no *small* acts of kindness.

When I was fourteen years old, my neighbor—who used to overpay me for shoveling the snow off his sidewalk and driveway—showed me a small act of kindness with some life advice and a delicious Greek pastry. It took about a minute. That was fifty-one years ago, and I remember it like it was yesterday. The gentleman passed away decades ago. But he will not be forgotten as long as I'm still around.

In my early thirties, I wrote a letter to a professional cartoonist, Jack Cassady, to ask his advice on how to break into the cartooning business. Jack's advice—which arrived in two separate letters—probably took him less than an hour in all to put together. It changed my life forever.

Some years after *Dilbert* became a huge hit, I was invited to lunch by a young lawyer who had just launched his own comic strip and wanted some advice on making it successful. At the time, his comic only ran on one website, and I don't think there was much, if any, money involved. I spent ninety minutes of my life dispensing my best advice as he took notes between bites of lunch. That young man was (and still is) Stephan Pastis, creator of the hugely successful

comic strip *Pearls Before Swine* and creator of *Timmy Failure*, a successful series of books for kids. Has Pastis paid forward my act of kindness by advising other young cartoonists?

Of course he has.

There are no small acts of kindness.

CHAPTER 5

Physical Health Reframes

I often hear from people on social media that one or more of my reframes on diet and exercise helped them lose massive amounts of weight, often 40 to 80 pounds or more. This outcome is perhaps the most surprising part of my career, and I don't expect you to believe it's real until you finish this section of the book. I think you will see the potential right away, and you will know if it works in only a week or two. It won't cost you a penny. All you need to do is think about diet and fitness in a new way that I'll describe here.

DIET AND WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Words matter, even when you're talking to yourself. Every word is like a package of programming code that alters your brain circuitry. But some words are weak, and some have more energy. Here's a perfect example.

Usual Frame: When I am hungry, I eat food.

Reframe: Some food is fuel. Some food is entertainment.

If everything you eat when you are hungry is "food," that makes junk food and healthy food accidental equals—not in a logical sense but in a word category sense. That's unhelpful programming.

If instead you make a habit of sorting all your eating options into *fuel* versus *entertainment*, making the right decisions becomes easier. That's because "nutrition" is a low-energy word compared to fuel or entertainment. No one thinks, *mm-mmm ... nutrition*. Compare that to the word *fuel*, which is literally a substitute word for energy, and of course *entertainment* is something we naturally crave. The words have a natural persuasion in this situation because humans are drawn to energy and fun, and we're bored by the topic of nutrition despite knowing its importance.

Is candy fuel or entertainment? If you are hungry, entertainment isn't what you need. And if you want entertainment, you can probably find a

better option. It might seem counterintuitive that you can manipulate yourself with words you chose on your own. But that's how words work. Words are the building blocks of sentences, of course, but many words carry a little package of power that influences you independently from the context of the sentence. You have a lifetime of putting food in your mouth, but if I said you were putting entertainment in your mouth, it would disrupt your automatic process and make you think about your eating decision.

Yes, you can manipulate *yourself* with words that help you manage what you eat the same way politicians manipulate others with words. I first learned about the power of individual words when I studied to be a hypnotist. And as a writer, I have three decades of experience picking the right-powered words. Being good at selecting words is the difference between being persuasive and being annoying.

To pick the most powerful words for controlling your diet choices, pay attention to how words feel in each context. Here are some questions I ask myself:

What does the word remind me of? And is that thing compatible with the message I mean to send?

Is the word specific enough? Too specific?

Does the word *sound* compatible with my intention when I hear the word aloud?

Does the word automatically drag a distracting thought—often a naughty one—into the conversation?

Does it rhyme? Rhymes are sticky and persuasive.

Is it fun to say the word aloud?

Is the word overused and worn out?

Will the word trigger someone?

I might be leaving out some questions, but you get the idea. Before selecting the right-powered word, I put it through a lot of filters. Only one of those filters involves the definition of the word. The rest are about how the word feels and what power it carries with it, either accidental or earned.

You saw the power of word substitution in this earlier reframe: Alcohol is poison. Substituting one word is the easiest type of reframe. You'll see

numerous opportunities for such reframes over the course of your life. Which brings us to this one-word reframe.

Usual Frame: Overeating is a willpower problem.

Reframe: Overeating is a knowledge problem.

If you think a lack of willpower is why you make bad eating choices, you won't have any tools for fixing your situation because willpower isn't real. What can you do to increase your willpower—grimace harder? We have no mechanism for adjusting our willpower because willpower is an imaginary concept. What we have instead of willpower is competing preferences, nothing more. If you prefer delicious food today over having a healthy weight tomorrow, you will eat that delicious food. Willpower never comes into play. It's simply how we describe events after the fact. An empty concept.

Unlike willpower, knowledge is not meaningless. We all know what it takes to increase our knowledge. My proposition to you is that learning how to find and prepare food that is both convenient and healthy is something anyone can do by making continuous small improvements. The more you experiment with healthy food choices, the more equipped you will be to offer yourself a good option when you get hungry. If you're hungry when the only convenient food is unhealthy stuff, you will eat that unhealthy food. But if you're hungry and only have healthy food in your home that also tastes great, you will probably do well in controlling your weight. So-called "willpower" has nothing to do with it.

Here's another reframe you might find useful for maintaining a healthy weight.

Usual Frame: I eat too much of the wrong food.

Reframe: I spend too much time with the wrong people.

You're the average of the five people you spend the most time with, motivational speaker Jim Rohn famously said. I don't know about you, but the people with whom I spend the most time are also the people with whom I most often dine. And if one of those friends has a hankering for some fast food, I'm likely to get some french fries while we're there. I don't think the people I spend time with necessarily influence my beliefs and attitudes about eating since most of them are red meat eaters and I am not. But they

do influence what types of food are convenient for me. Your influencers might be members of your household who buy groceries that get added to your household temptations. It's hard to avoid the food-related influence of family and friends, especially when it puts you in the proximity of delicious yet unhealthy food.

I don't think you would lose much weight if all your closest friends were obese. It wouldn't seem urgent. You would feel normal and unjudged, at least around your friends. But if all your friends looked great in swimwear but you were 80 pounds heavier than you wanted to be, I believe peer pressure would have an impact on your food choices.

People tend to talk about food with their friends. If your closest friends know more about healthy eating than you do, the knowledge transfer to you would be an enormous benefit. If the opposite were true and your friends operated under food misconceptions, I assume some of them would spill over to you. Spend time with people who have figured out how to be healthy eaters. Some of that is certain to rub off on you.

Here is our next reframe for maintaining a healthy weight.

Usual Frame: I want food, so I must be hungry.

Reframe: I want food, so I might be tired.

If you think hunger is only caused by an empty stomach, you might be surprised to learn that not getting enough sleep mimics the same feeling of hunger. If you have ever experienced a day in which eating didn't seem to satisfy your hunger, you might be trying to solve the wrong problem. You might need a nap more than you need food. By the time you feel hungry, it might be too late to nap it away. So remind yourself that you wouldn't need to wonder about the source of your hunger if you put more effort into your sleeping systems.

A willpower-driven diet rarely works for a variety of reasons, chief among them that humans don't have much willpower, if any, when it comes to resisting pleasure. But anyone can learn more about food choices, which makes it easier to trade out the bad food for the good. The reason anyone eats junk food is that it tastes great and is inexpensive and convenient. Healthy alternatives can fit that model too but not unless you work at them. Which means a lifetime of continuous learning about what foods are healthiest. You think you already know what foods are best for you, but you

probably don't. For example, would you know an avocado is better than a carrot? You do? Great. Now tell me if an avocado is better than a peanut. Oh … you know that, too???

Okay, I acknowledge you know a lot. But my experience is that few people can correctly answer five-out-of-five in my food comparison challenges. And my subjective impression is that people who get all the answers right are maintaining a healthy weight. It isn't a coincidence. Knowledge about food is the strongest correlation I have seen (anecdotally) with weight. In the context of diet, knowledge is a direct substitute for willpower, which isn't a real thing anyway.

On to our next reframe.

Usual Frame: I have a weight loss *goal*.

Reframe: I need to create a weight loss *system* for myself.

It's okay to have a weight loss goal, too, but if you want to succeed, focus on your system for getting there. Your system will differ from mine, and that's fine. We're different people in different situations. For example, my system has four main components for managing weight:

1. Don't keep unhealthy food in the house.
2. Keep learning about food over an entire lifetime.
3. Continuously experiment with preparing healthy food to taste great.
4. Check my weight and look at my full body in the mirror every day.

I asked my X followers what reframes they found useful for maintaining a healthy weight, and here are some that worked for them in the diet domain, starting with this familiar-looking one.

Usual Frame: Sugar is delicious but don't overdo it.

Reframe: Sugar is poison.

The *sugar is poison* reframe probably came from a book of the same name. This reframe was a popular response to my query, so people must have found value in it. It is the same approach as *alcohol is poison*. It's easier to avoid poison than delicious food.

On to the next reframe …

A great way to manage your habits and impulses is to define yourself as the sort of person who doesn't do that sort of thing. As odd as that sounds, it works. One of our strongest motivations is to be seen as consistent, to others and to ourselves. If you use repetition to brand yourself as a certain type of person, all your other decisions become simpler. All you must do is act how that sort of person would act. Most of our decisions are somewhat automatic and reflexive based on who we are. A vegetarian doesn't have to think about eating a steak, and an off-duty cop doesn't think too hard before stepping in to stop a crime in progress. Both are acting according to who they are.

If you don't like the decisions you make, turn yourself into the kind of person who doesn't make those mistakes. You will be amazed how much this helps. Here's a specific example.

Usual Frame: I am tempted by bad carbs.

Reframe: I'm not the kind of person who eats bad carbs.

Another reframe suggested by an X user takes the irrational nature of reframes to the limit.

Usual Frame: My stomach has room for more food.

Reframe: I've had enough.

If you pair "I've had enough" with stopping eating and do it often enough, the sentence itself will become a key. That means your brain will pair the trigger sentence with the response until it becomes automatic. Say the magic sentence and watch your body fall in line.

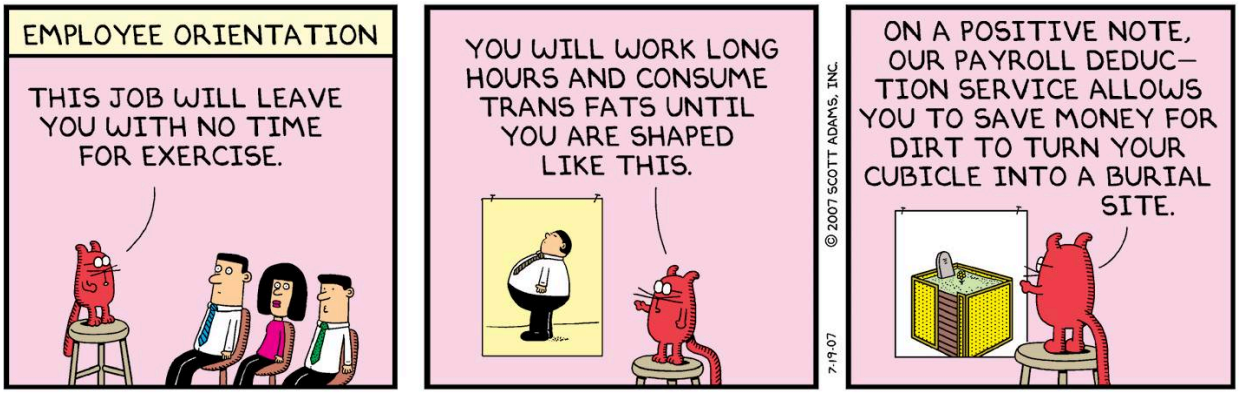
Here's another useful diet reframe.

Usual Frame: I'm hungry, so I need food.

Reframe: I'm hungry, so I need protein.

You need protein and "good" carbs as well as fat for a healthy diet. But carbs—both good and bad—are abundant and easy to get. Same with fat. But protein often takes some extra effort. That's why a protein-first reframe helps keep you on the right track. If you make it a habit to look for protein first, it will be easier to skip the "bad" carbs that are more convenient.

Exercise


EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION
THIS JOB WILL LEAVE YOU WITH NO TIME FOR EXERCISE.
YOU WILL WORK LONG HOURS AND CONSUME TRANS FATS UNTIL YOU ARE SHAPED LIKE THIS.
ON A POSITIVE NOTE, OUR PAYROLL DEDUC-TION SERVICE ALLOWS YOU TO SAVE MONEY FOR DIRT TO TURN YOUR CUBICLE INTO A BURIAL SITE.
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7-19-07

Everyone seems to have an opinion about how to exercise right. There are thousands of books on the topic with all kinds of variations. It can be intimidating to the non-athlete. That's why I recommend reframing all the complexity away and instead focusing on the few things you need to get right to have a strong foundation.

Usual Frame: Exercising requires willpower and motivation.

Reframe: Exercising is easier than not exercising if you turn it into a habit.

You can learn to love exercise and turn it into an addictive habit by not overdoing it, not doing boring exercises, and rewarding yourself every time. For example, you might start by taking a nice walk in the evening and rewarding yourself with a delicious protein shake. If you keep up the walking, it will eventually start to feel too easy to do short walks, and you will naturally extend them. Then let's say your friend invites you to go on a bike ride, and you haven't ridden in years. Your walking habit will give you confidence you can pedal okay, too, so you say yes.

The thing you do NOT need to focus on—at least initially—is obsessing over the "best" form of exercise for you. That question is settled: The best exercises are the ones you are willing to do. And if you start with some painful and challenging form of exercise, don't expect to be doing it for long. Your brain will talk you out of hurting your body. This is a hypnotist's truth: If you punish yourself for an action, you can guarantee the action will not last.

Once you become "one who exercises," you will discover you learn a lot about alternative methods from others. Your fitness education will happen organically. People like to yap about their exercise systems. You can't avoid it.

You will get dragged into learning more than you ever wanted to know about exercise.

Usual Frame: It's important to learn the best ways to exercise.

Reframe: The best exercises are the ones you are willing to do.

I'm a lifelong gym rat, and 90 percent of what I know about fitness came from clicking on articles on the Internet and being near people who know how to do things right. You can do the same. Once you turn your fitness into a routine, you begin the infinite journey of refining it for your needs. You'll get there. What matters most is that you're physically active every day. The rest will follow in time.

Sleep

It isn't my imagination that people are complaining more than ever about a lack of sleep. Modern life and sleep are not compatible. I'm going to assume you already know all the tips and tricks for good sleep, so I won't cover them here. If you need those tips, you can google "how to sleep better"—or any variation—and get the same set of useful tips on a variety of sites. All I will add to the skill of sleep is this one reframe.

Usual Frame: I can't get to sleep.

Reframe: I didn't work hard enough.

For the first several years of my cartooning career, I kept my day job at the local phone company. I woke up at 4:00 AM every day and collapsed into bed around 10:00 PM every night, having completed two full-time jobs and usually some exercise. In those years, I never had a problem with sleep. I would be unconscious in minutes and sleep through the night.

Other times, I experienced days in which I had more leisure than work. On those lazy days, I sometimes didn't make it to the gym. Getting to sleep under those conditions was a struggle.

Once the pattern became clear to me, I started using sleep as a gauge for how much energy I "wasted" by not working hard enough to make sleep automatic and easy. Now I know to burn off my extra energy in the early evening if I haven't done enough work or exercise by then. So instead of focusing on the going-to-sleep part of the going-to-sleep process, I focus on living the kind of day that makes sleep easy and automatic.

This reframe won't work for all readers. I dislike sleep in general, and I'm ambitious by nature, so the emotional impact of reminding myself I "didn't work hard enough" hits me like fighting words. If you love sleep, and you're not trying to conquer the universe, this reframe might not be for you.

If you are not convinced you can "work" yourself into better sleep, test it for yourself by taking a long walk—or whatever you prefer for exercise—and mentally track how you sleep after exercising that day versus on your non-exercise days. You should notice a big difference. And that will be your motivation.

HOW'S YOUR NEW BABY?
WONDERFUL, BUT THE LACK OF SLEEP IS TAKING A TOLL ON MY BODY.
© 2002 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
7/31/02
HOW'S BECKY DOING?
I AM BECKY. BOB LOOKS WORSE.

CHAPTER 6

Reality Reframes

The frustrating thing about so-called reality is that we don't agree what is real and what is an illusion. You might see the hand of God in all things important, your friend might see reincarnation as the dominant model of reality, and I might believe we are simulated creatures—basically software—created by some other entity. Most of the time it doesn't matter which model you choose. You can still eat, sleep, work, and procreate.

But sometimes it *does* matter what is real, and the quality of your decisions depend on it. I'm not the final authority on what is real, so I suggest you favor whatever filter on reality helps you predict the best. If the reframes in this chapter do a better job of predicting the future than your current filter on reality, consider making these your default beliefs. If your existing worldview predicts better, keep that. Our tiny human brains probably can't know the full nature of reality, but sometimes we can tell what works and what does not. Let's dig in.

NUCLEAR POWER

In February 2022, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the European Union was attempting to reframe nuclear energy as "green" to make it easier to gain public and government support. A similar evolution was happening in the United States at the same time. The most dangerous form of energy in the world—said the critics—was being transformed into one of the safest via the miracle of . . . words.

This book will not argue the merits of nuclear energy. The short version is that every assumption about the risks of nuclear energy turned out to be wrong. The modern nuclear power plant designs—usually referred to as Gen 3—have been widely used for years, have never had a meltdown, and have never been associated with a single death. (Earlier designs did have issues.) The nuclear waste problem shrunk when it became obvious it made sense to simply store the waste at the nuclear sites where it was produced,

in special containers. Best of all, the newest versions of nuclear power plants—Gen 4—can use that nuclear waste for fuel.

Everything I described has been true for years, but the old assumptions about nuclear energy risks still dominated the public's thinking, including government officials. What changed it all was a combination of three things:

1. Energy shortages and accelerating fears about climate change triggered a more flexible attitude about nuclear energy. The alternatives were plainly insufficient.
2. Skilled American nuclear power advocate Michael Shellenberger almost single-handedly educated governments and the public on nuclear energy benefits and risks.
3. Years passed without major issues in any Gen 3 nuclear power plant. Time fixes a lot of things.

I give you this example to demonstrate how a reframe can change the world. In the case of nuclear energy, the reframe might literally save civilization, assuming it helps nuclear energy get public support. All of that is possible on the back of one word: green.

Usual Frame: Nuclear Power is risky.

Reframe: Nuclear power is green.

It's true that one person can sometimes change the world. So can one word if that word is a well-chosen reframe.

You might be tempted to ask me why, if I know how to change civilization with one word, haven't I already done it? That's a good question. Now I have a question for you.

What makes you so sure I haven't?

HUMAN RATIONALITY

The most meaningful reframe of my life happened in my twenties when I studied to become a hypnotist. My hypnosis teacher taught the class that humans are not rational creatures; they are creatures who rationalize decisions after they make them.

The first time you hear that reframe—either from a hypnotist or anyone else—it's reasonable to be skeptical. After all, you don't FEEL irrational. You are sure you make most of your decisions based on logic and facts. But then you start noticing that some OTHER people are indeed irrational (according to you), and they do seem to rationalize after the fact.

Then you notice it's ***most*** other people.

Then you notice it's ***almost everyone except you***.

Then, grudgingly, you start to understand it's you, too. Because you are human, and that's the way we're wired.

But we did not evolve to understand reality. We only evolved to survive. It was once assumed that understanding your reality gave you a survival advantage in evolutionary terms. But that has since been debunked. It turns out that understanding reality is closer to a disadvantage than an advantage in evolutionary terms.

That said, humans can be rational in limited situations in which the playing field is small and well-defined. For example, humans might shop for the best bargain or choose the shortest route to a destination. That's rational. But most topics in life are not clear and not simple. In those cases, we retreat to our biases and never leave. I try hard to escape that trap with mixed results. Roughly speaking, I now experience the world through this reframe.

Usual Frame: People are rational 90 percent of the time.

Reframe: People are rational 10 percent of the time if that.

TWO MOVIES, ONE SCREEN

For most of my life, I believed that if I disagreed with someone on a social or political issue, one of us had to be wrong. Perhaps we could both be wrong, but since our opinions differed, only one of us could be right, at least under normal conditions.

That filter on life was maddening. I would try to "win" every disagreement by using my so-called rational mind to find out where we differed in facts, logic, or bias. I reasoned that if I could identify the root cause of the disagreement, I could easily find common ground.

That almost never worked.

It took me decades to figure out why something as straightforward as checking each other's logic and facts would consistently fail to create agreement. It was as if the other person became temporarily insane when presented with a superior argument. Even weirder, they thought the problem was on my side. And I wasn't entirely sure they were wrong.

Eventually, I came to see the human relationship with reality as so subjective it is nonsense to discuss who is "right" in situations that can't be reliably measured. And most things can't be measured in ways we would agree are sufficient. I mean, we can try to measure anything we want, but the next observer will say it was measured wrong. You can rely on that. So what do you do to stay sane in such a world?

I developed this reframe to help. I started using the reframe in 2016, when the political news in America became absurdly partisan. I often hear from my followers on social media that it helped them get past the frustration of dealing with people who seem trapped in their own bubble reality.

Usual Frame: One of us is right, and one is wrong.

Reframe: We are watching two different movies on one screen.

The only two facts humans know for sure are that we exist and that some things appear to be predictable. For example, you know that every time you hit your so-called funny bone just right, it hurts. But perhaps everything about that except the predictability of it is manufactured by our minds. You might think you are petting a stray cat on the sidewalk, and I might see you picking up something from the ground. So long as your story and mine never need to be consistent—which is generally the case—we can experience different subjective realities. In your reality, you were petting a cat, and in mine you were picking up something from the ground. Yet we both witnessed the "same" event. I call that *two movies playing on one screen*.

The power of this reframe is that it releases you from any obligation to make others bend to your way of thinking. Others are often aware of the same events and facts as you, but while they're looking at the same screen at the same time, they see a different movie based on their biases and expectations. Once you understand this as the dominant model of all our disagreements, you won't feel any pressure to "fix" people who disagree

with you. Simply accept that you're watching the same screen but a different movie. It is oddly freeing.

HAVING KIDS AND PASSING ON YOUR GENES

If you are grappling with the question of having children and don't feel the calling to do so, you might feel bad about your decision. Society encourages parenthood, and you'll probably have to answer a lot of well-intentioned but annoying questions about why you are choosing not to reproduce.

Some good reasons to have kids include religion (if that's your thing), personal satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and a stronger society. The weakest reason—but often the one that has the strongest pull on us—is the innate desire to spread our genes and not be "forgotten" in time. You might have no conscious thoughts along those lines, but the instinct lives in most of us. If it did not, we'd easily talk ourselves out of having kids because of the inconvenience and expense.

This reframe is limited to helping you suppress your natural impulse to spread your genes. Civilization needs more babies, not fewer, so don't use this reframe unless you are sure about your decision.

Usual Frame: You should spread your genes.

Reframe: No matter what you do, your genes will be diluted with each generation until your contribution nears zero.

A secondary use for this reframe is if you experience the tragedy of losing a child. You'll have many negative thoughts about the experience, but if one of those thoughts involves carrying your genes forward for eternity, you can reframe that thought out of your mind: It wasn't going to happen anyway. After a few generations of dilution, your contribution could be limited to how waxy those future children's ears are. That isn't the sort of legacy you need to build a life around.

PREDICTING VERSUS UNDERSTANDING REALITY

If every time you said the word "sunshine" a stranger appeared from a nearby hiding place and punched you in the face, would you keep saying the word? Don't answer too quickly. In this imaginary example, there is no science or logic to tell us why it happens. You're a rational person, and you make decisions based on evidence and reason. And in my example, there is no evidence to suggest there could possibly be a correlation much less causation between an ordinary word and the unknown assailant.

So … do you say "sunshine" again?

Much of life is like my weird example in the sense we don't know how to explain anything we experience. But we think we do. We think we know why one thing happens versus another, but usually we don't. We don't know why loved ones act the way they do. We don't think the news is necessarily true. And even science is looking a lot like guesswork because of its notable misfires in recent years.

Oh, I'm not done yet. Don't take this personally, but you usually don't know why *you* do things either. The part of your brain that explains why you do stuff doesn't even engage until *after* you decide. Humans are rationalizers, not deciders.

Given all that we puny humans do NOT know, is there anything we do know? Yes, as I said in the last section, we know at least two things:

1. We know we exist.
2. We know some worldviews predict better than others.

Most of the rest of our so-called reality is our subjective interpretation of who-knows-what. And that leads us to this reframe.

Usual Frame: The best worldview is the ***true*** one.

Reframe: The best worldview is one that ***predicts*** the best.

In my "sunshine" example, any human in that situation who kept saying the trigger word would likely start imagining they know why the punch-in-the-face kept happening. Some would say God is angry. Some would come

to believe they must be crazy, they're imagining it, or they're dreaming. Some would assume a nemesis of some sort is behind it. Others might say poltergeist, a curse, or magic of some kind.

None of those explanations would matter so long as the pattern was predictive. All you need to do is avoid saying that one word—sunshine—and your problem is solved. Most of your life is like that. I don't know why electricity works—at least not in any detail—but I know the lights come on when I hit the switch. ***It is predictable***. And predictable is the nearest our little brains can get to truth.

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

The best example of a worldview that predicts well is "follow the money." I already mentioned this in relation to predicting the fate of a marriage, but it works in almost any domain. People can be expected to act in ways that maximize their money, at least as they see it. The weird part of this worldview is that it seems to predict even when you think it should not.

Usual Frame: Predicting people's actions involves many variables.

Reframe: Follow the money. That's all you need.

For example, if you knew a trusted member of a religious organization made an important decision, you would assume money was not the top priority. One would assume the religion itself would be the top priority along with empathy for the disadvantaged. But in those situations, you can reliably predict the decision will follow whatever path is also the best financial outcome for the decision-maker, directly or indirectly. In such a situation, I would expect the religious leader to make an argument that depended on religious principles and empathy. And the argument might make sense. Or not.

What matters is that I could predict which way the decision would go. That's all we know, or think we know. If you extend that worldview to include knowing the religious figure is a fraud or a hypocrite, that's mind-reading—and taking things too far. This hypothetical religious figure *might* be acting in naked self-interest. The other possibility is they don't know they are rationalizing their own self-interest. That explanation is at least as likely as a religious figure being corrupt.

Look for patterns that predict. Don't assume you know why. It would be terrific if you did know why as that would help predict even better. But our tendency to mind-read imaginary motives in people is far greater than our ability to discern real motives.

If you ask people what motivates them, they might not say money, but watch how often their ethics-based preferences match their economic interests. Polite society asks us to express our priorities as lofty goals such as making the world a better place, helping children, succeeding in business, that sort of thing. It would sound rude to say you're in it for the money and are only pretending to care about doing good. And perhaps you've convinced yourself you are not in it for the money. That's not uncommon.

For example, if you ask me why I'm writing this book instead of shuffling off to rich-guy retirement, I'll probably say something about how good it feels to improve people's lives and how I like to feel useful. Every bit of both is true. But if you want to predict how I spend my time, check to see if I expect the book to make me some money. And sure enough, I do.

You might tell yourself money doesn't influence how you think about your choices and your priorities. But it sure influences what your body is doing while your mind is enjoying lofty thoughts about yourself. We humans often have no idea why we do what we do. Sometimes you must "follow the money" even to understand yourself. Or more generally, selfishness explains nearly everything about human behavior.

LIFE IS AN ADVENTURE

I heard this reframe from Dr. Jordan Peterson. It matches one I've been using for a few years to great effect.

Usual Frame: Life is about avoiding pain while pursuing happiness and meaning.

Reframe: Life is an adventure.

Life is full of discomforts. If you think your purpose is to avoid discomfort, you will be unhappy because there is no real hope of succeeding. Problems are part of life. But if you frame your life as an

adventure, your temporary discomforts will feel as if they belong in the game to keep it interesting.

As a point of comparison, people who like to go camping are willingly taking on a load of inconvenience and discomfort before they even get the campfire lit. In any other context, willingly taking on those discomforts might look like insanity. But when viewed as part of the camping adventure, the psychological discomfort is greatly reduced.

This is one of my favorite filters on reality. Now when something goes wrong, the situation feels no different than missing one shot in a basketball game. Missing half of all shots is expected in basketball, so missing any one shot doesn't crush your spirit. If you live your life that way instead of crying "Why me???!!!" at every bump in the road, you are likely to better enjoy the ride.

My take on the adventure frame is that we are computer simulations put here either to entertain our creators or to test strategies for their civilization. I go through my day as if I'm in a video game, which makes a lot of the stress disappear. Does it matter how unrealistic or dead-wrong I am about my reality? Nope. All that matters is that the reframe works in some identifiable way, and this one does. It makes me happy. I recommend it.

INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

Much of adult life is spent trying to discern who is lying and who is telling the truth. When it comes to the legal system, we take the view that citizens are innocent until proven guilty. That's an improvement (a reframe) from labeling a person potentially guilty, or maybe innocent, maybe not. As with most reframes, it is not literally true that someone is innocent until proven guilty, except in a strict legal sense. It's simply a better system to act as if innocence is the starting assumption to avoid harming the truly innocent.

The problem appears when we extend "innocent until proven guilty" to corporations and government entities. Given the outsized power those entities wield over citizens, it's a better system to think of them as guilty until proven innocent. That's why public corporations must show their financials and why elections can be audited.

Keep this rule in mind the next time a large company or government entity is accused of some heinous behavior. Until they can prove otherwise,

assume guilt. You won't often be wrong. But please be cautious about extending the presumption of guilt to any specific *individuals* running those organizations. Citizens are always presumed innocent until proven guilty, and I think we all appreciate that.

Usual Frame: Everyone is innocent until proven guilty.

Reframe: Citizens are innocent until proven guilty. Corporations and governments are presumed guilty until proven innocent.

How often will big organizations cheat and lie? More often than you think. The larger the organization, the less likely anything they say is completely true. And there's a reason for that. This reframe reveals it.

Usual Frame: No cheating has been detected, so the organization is innocent.

Reframe: Whenever there is an opportunity for cheating and not getting caught, a lot to gain from cheating, and lots of people involved, cheating will always happen.

The larger the organization, the more opportunities there will be to cheat and get away with it. That's because crime can easily hide in a complicated bureaucracy.

Don't let anyone make you feel bad about distrusting a large organization. Distrust is the best starting position. If a company can make itself transparent and reduce mistrust, it's welcome to do so. But until then, hold organizations to a higher standard than citizens. Assume guilt but give them every opportunity to prove otherwise.

WHERE OPINIONS COME FROM

We want to believe our opinions come from some combination of our experiences, our knowledge, and our reason. That's what it feels like. But nothing remotely like that is happening. Most of our opinions are assigned to us by the media. We pick a "team" we want to join, then the media tells that team what to believe.

I could spend the remainder of this book explaining why science agrees with me about how opinions are formed, but it would be easier for you to directly observe the media assigning opinions to teams.

Look at the people on whatever political side you are *not* on. Do you notice how they all seem to have the same opinions, opinions which in your view don't make much sense?

That's how they see you, too. And according to the hypnotist's reframe—that people are irrational 90 percent of the time—you can clearly see that the other team is brainwashed. They see it in you, too. But neither of you can see it in yourselves. That's the normal way of the world.

Okay, okay, you're the exception. So am I. The two of us make rational decisions every time, but I think you'd agree other people seem to be moving like a brainwashed herd. Thank goodness we're not like them.

Usual Frame: People come up with their own opinions.

Reframe: People join teams, and the media assigns their opinions.

The best way I have found to exempt yourself from media-assigned opinions is to make it a habit to argue the opposite side of each debate. If you can't do that without laughing, using sarcasm, or making an intentionally bad argument, you probably don't have a genuine opinion. You have an assigned opinion.

Once you can make a full argument for all sides of a debate, you might be thinking rationally. If your opinions are identical to the bumper sticker wisdom of your team, you might have a problem.

The usefulness of this reframe is that it tells you logic and facts won't help you change many minds. If people did not arrive at their opinions by rational means, a rational argument isn't going to talk them out of it. Instead, I recommend asking them to repeat back your argument to demonstrate they understand it. If they can—which would be rare—they can be persuaded. Most people will change the subject to escape the trap.

Perhaps the main benefit of this reframe is that you neutralize the frustration when dealing with people on the other side of issues. Once you realize they're not the sources of their own opinions—and probably can't explain their own opinions with any clarity—you're free to see them as victims, not opponents. I don't get stressed when a victim of brainwashing disagrees with me. I feel bad for them. And that empathy feels way better than being ticked-off because some stranger refuses to see the alleged wisdom of my opinions.

PEOPLE THINK LIKE YOU

One of the worst misconceptions of life is that other people think the same way you do. Humans are similar in a lot of ways, but in any specific situation your basket of preferences and mine will be different. That means you can't reliably predict what people will do or why they will do it (unless money is involved). But we imagine we can predict well because we make the poor assumption that people are working with the same set of variables and intentions we are. That is rarely the case.

If you don't understand someone's motives, and you end up guessing based on how you would feel in the same situation, you're indulging in nonsense.

Usual Frame: Others think and feel approximately as I do.

Reframe: Others are unimaginably different.

When others act in ways you would not, don't assume they are necessarily lying, selfish, stupid weasels. They might be exactly that, but that's not the first explanation you should go with. Instead, assume all you are seeing is a difference in priorities or a difference in who brainwashed each of you.

The power of this reframe is that it helps you understand why you can't change people's minds. You might be looking at the same facts, but the processes in your heads are as different as porcupines and bowling balls.

CHAPTER 7

The Operating System for Your Mind

Scientists once believed that adult brains don't generate new cells. They believed we were born with all the brain cells we would ever have and that those cells die over the course of an adult's life. In recent years, science discovered that brains do create new cells. In related news, we have a growing appreciation of something called neuroplasticity—the ability of the brain to create new pathways and new behaviors in any number of ways. In other words, your brain is programmable if you learn how to access the user interface. With this book, I have been teaching you how to write and insert code (programs) into your brain. That's what the reframes are—software upgrades to your brain. And they cause physical changes to your brain, just as any other learning experience does.

Once you accept the programmable nature of your own brain, you can get serious about becoming what I call the author of your own experience. This replaces the common view that we are products of our experiences, our genes, and a whole host of factors only fate controls.

Usual Frame: You are the product of your experiences and genes.

Reframe: You are the author of your experience.

This reframe moves you out of victim mode into player mode. If you are just the result of outside forces and genes you can't control, that doesn't provide much motivation. But if you are the author of your own experience, you understand you can create your life one day at a time. The reframes in this book are the code that lets you do just that. Find the reframes in these pages that best match the "dangling wires" in your brain and watch how quickly they get reattached.

I find it useful to think of brains as having operating systems, like computers. Your human operating system is your reflexive pattern for interacting with a new situation. You might layer some knowledge and experience on top of that operating system, but you will still be limited to what it allows you. There are four types of human operating systems I encounter most:

Selfish: I take whatever I can get. Others would do the same.

Revenge: I need revenge for all insults and offenses, both real and imagined. (And most are imagined.)

Victim: I am being victimized by nearly everyone and can't do anything about it.

Reciprocity: If I make myself useful, good things will come to me.

Of the four operating systems, the first three are deeply flawed. It might feel good in the short run to be selfish, get revenge, or play the victim. But in the long run, the only operating system that can bring you a high-quality life is Reciprocity.

Usual Frame: I deserve to be treated well by others.

Reframe: You get what you give, on average. No one deserves anything.

I spend a lot of time and energy being generous to those who will never return the favor, and I know it. But I also know that being the type of person who would do such things builds trust and attracts people and business deals to me. I also know it only takes one person to reciprocate someday down the line, and that one instance could change my life. The Reciprocity operating system requires patience and the ability to put off pleasure now for long-term gain. That means it will come more easily to some people than others. But we can all learn to give more and act less like victims. If it helps, think of generosity as a selfish strategy. You're giving with the intention of getting something in return someday. You don't know when or what form it will take, but Reciprocity is always your best operating system for success.

Will people take advantage of your generosity? Absolutely. But it doesn't change the larger point that it's a good strategy.

THE SIMULATION

Who wants to get weird?

IT FEELS AS IF THE DAYS ARE GOING BY FASTER LATELY.
THAT'S BECAUSE WE'RE A COMPUTER SIMULATION THAT JUST GOT A SOFT-WARE UPGRADE.
© 2021 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
2-23-21
THERE'S REALLY NOTHING YOU CAN'T RUIN WITH THAT NONSENSE, IS THERE?
I HEAR THAT A LOT.

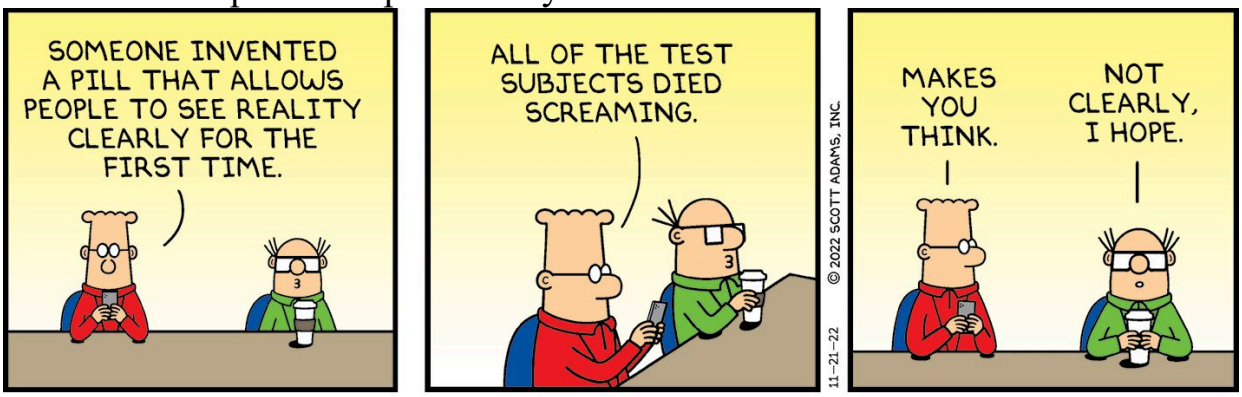
I give you The Simulation Hypothesis. It's the idea that what we perceive as our reality is a computer simulation created by an advanced species that may or may not look like us. The argument, in its simplest form, is that humans will soon be able to create artificially intelligent life forms who believe they are living independent lives in a simulated world. I would argue we have the technology to do such a thing now. All we need to do is tell the creatures in the simulation that they see more detail in the environment than they do. Coincidentally—or not—that's exactly how human brains work. We think we see detail in the environment, but we don't. That's all illusion. One might describe it as a software module that saves brain processing resources by making us believe we saw more details than we did. If a human creates a computer model that looks like one human, you might expect lots of detail. That's possible because only one person is being modeled and the computer can handle all that detail. But no programmer would include that sort of detail in a simulated world. They would save resources by making the characters in the simulation believe they were seeing more detail than they were unless it was something they needed to focus on. For example, if you needed to remove a sliver from your finger, the simulation would provide finer detail.

If we are a simulation, our reality could have the same constraints a software developer would run into when programming a game universe. For example, if a programmer created our universe, they would make sure it was physically impossible for us to travel past the programmed boundaries of our reality. And sure enough, the physical laws of our so-called reality make it impossible to travel fast enough to reach our outer boundaries.

The core argument for our reality being a simulation is that as soon as any advanced species—including humans—develops the skill to create such a simulation, they would surely make more than one. Maybe millions. And the simulations themselves would evolve to make their own simulations. So the

odds of us being the one original species and not one of the millions or trillions of simulations are low.

I'm a believer that we live in a simulated environment. I don't believe it because I'm convinced it's true. I have no way to know what even *is* true. It would be more accurate to say I find The Simulation a useful filter on life because it answers all my questions and gives me extra, special strategies for success. I'll explain that part shortly.


SOMEONE INVENTED A PILL THAT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO SEE REALITY CLEARLY FOR THE FIRST TIME.
ALL OF THE TEST SUBJECTS DIED SCREAMING.
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11-21-22
MAKES YOU THINK.
NOT CLEARLY, I HOPE.

As crazy as The Simulation Hypothesis is, some smart people find it credible. Elon Musk is the most famous among them, but the idea comes from American cognitive scientist and author Donald Hoffman. Spend some time on the Internet reading about The Simulation, and you might get hooked. But remember, it's not about what is true. It's about which filters and strategies of mind get you the best result.

I won't ask you to believe we're living in a simulation. I won't ask you to believe it's a rational hypothesis. I won't ask you to believe there is evidence or science or any solid argument to support that world view. But I will ask you to see The Simulation as one of many filters you can put on life to predict and explain. Like any of the simpler reframes, the only test it must pass is that you find it useful. I'll show you how to make it so.

Usual Frame: Reality is objective, and science helps us understand it.

Reframe: Our so-called reality is a simulation created by a higher intelligence.

Alternate: You are in a video game, and you have certain problems to solve to get to the next level.

If we are in a simulation, what is the point of it? I can think of several. The one that explains the most observations is that we're testing different strategies

for success on a wide variety of challenges—as stated earlier—so our creators know what solutions they can try in their world.

Have you ever noticed some people have the same odd problem over and over, but others will never once have that sort of problem? I call it a theme. One of my themes is that no matter where I live, I have continuous plumbing problems—the bad kinds. The odds of one person having so many continuous plumbing emergencies over several decades seem insanely low. That's why it looks programmed. It seems as if I'm A/B testing different ways to approach residential plumbing catastrophes. I'm getting good at it!

Or maybe we're an afterlife of some long-deceased species, looping through this same history for infinity. I expect to leave my digital personality in something like that before I go. Wouldn't my hypothetical creator—if humanlike—do the same?

Or maybe we are avatars (characters) in some sort of massive video game in which the way one wins is by producing the most kids, making the most money, or creating the most positive change.

Or maybe we're a reality show. That would explain why we seem to encounter one absurd situation after another.

The point is that we can imagine several reasons a simulated world would exist. But if we're simulated, what benefits would we get from knowing that?

I like to think that being aware you are simulated allows you to author the game as you go. In other words, you can focus intensely on what you want—and that alone will hack the simulation to produce the change. As noted in the Introduction, some call that affirmations. Some call it positive thinking. Others call it the Law of Attraction. All I know for sure is that the people who believe we live in a Simulation seem to get a lot of what they want compared to those who have other filters on reality. Case in point, Elon Musk has done okay. I can pay my rent, too.

AUTHOR VERSUS AUDIENCE

If you believe you can author the simulation with your intentions, you're likely to experience a reality in which that seems to be exactly what is happening. That's how I experience life. Even my bad luck seems eerily similar to things I had been thinking about too much, as if I created it by mistake. Many people who practice affirmations tell me about their experiences—they, too, feel as if they're authoring their own destiny.

The possibility of authoring your future—or even feeling as if you are—is why The Simulation Hypothesis is a powerful reframe. If your view of reality is limited to the common view of cause and effect, you might feel relatively helpless to change anything in your life. But if you use affirmations and your dreams appear to come true against the odds, you open up to new possibilities. Or it feels as if you do. And that can be just as satisfying.

My current view of reality is that I am in some sort of simulated environment, and I am projecting a subjective bubble of reality everywhere I go just in time to make me think it all seems real. If you and I meet, we can have two different realities and later leave with two different memories of the event. The discrepancies in our realities will never be obvious because we're unlikely to compare our memories of it in any detail. If for some reason we ever did compare our memories, we would conclude that one or both of us had a faulty memory and that alone explains the discrepancy.

This is how we all live in our own bubble realities, unconcerned that our stories do not sync with the bubble next to us. Importantly, it's also how the computing device running our simulation can handle the nearly infinite complexity of a simulated universe—it doesn't. It just convinces us it did, and we imagine we see it.

Usual Frame: We have different memories.

Reframe: We created different subjective realities.

One of the great comforts of this reframe is that I no longer feel stress when I can't persuade someone that my view of events is the accurate one. Now I accept that two or more "realities" were running at the same time; there is no reason they need to match. It isn't easy to get comfortable with that idea, but if you can pull it off, it pays for itself in reduced frustration.

Another advantage of living as though I'm in a simulation is that almost anything seems possible unless ruled out by observed past events. I never feel limited, and I think that attitude helps me take on tougher problems with enthusiasm.

If you will allow me to go full-weird, I speculate that imagining, planning, and predicting might have the same impact on reality. In each case, you visualize the future, and I suspect—without the support of science or facts—that the more accurately you imagine your future, the more you become the author of your reality. I wouldn't bet my life on it, but it would explain a lot that has happened in my life.

The Simulation Hypothesis might be an accurate description of base reality or not. But like any other reframe, the truth probably doesn't matter. What matters is that it seems to work for you or not.

THE USER INTERFACE FOR REALITY

We will never agree on the "true" nature of reality. But we might agree that some interpretations of reality make you happier than others. As I sit in Starbucks writing this chapter, I can see a valid argument for either optimism or pessimism about the current state of the world. I don't know which filter is more accurate, but I do know one makes me feel better than the other. So I choose the happy-making one. Under either interpretation of reality, I act the same, taking normal precautions against the unknown.

A common view of reality assumes there is a solid layer of realness just below our feet, and all we're doing is choosing which shoes to wear when we walk on it. This is compatible with how most people see the world. But it isn't the only way.

The deeper—and potentially more useful—view of reality is that we author our reality as we go, so almost nothing is out of bounds. As I've said many times, I don't claim that view of reality is the closest to true. All I know for sure is that people who act as though they can author their reality seem to get results that are hard to explain. I am one of them, and I have a few successful friends who see things the same way but don't like to say so in public.

Usual Frame: Reality is objective.

Reframe: There might be an objective reality, but human brains don't have access to it.

Is it crazy to imagine you can author reality itself, including the things outside your direct physical control? That's a trick question. I made you think past the sale. The "sale" is the assumption that believing you can author your reality—and being wrong about it—is a bad thing. There is no evidence of that. Anecdotally, it looks the opposite, that thinking you can author your reality gives you good outcomes whether there is any underlying truth to it or not. The people with the least respect for our so-called reality are the ones changing it. Elon Musk is my go-to example once again. He specializes in making things happen that many experts think are impossible—in their realities. Most great innovators have a healthy disrespect for the impossible.

For the purposes of this book, I'm only asking you to consider the *method* of viewing reality as fully programmable—by you. To get the benefits from this approach, you do not need to believe you know the true nature of reality. That can remain a mystery. All I ask is that you be open to *acting as though you can author it*. See what happens. You might be surprised. That reframe looks like this.

Usual Frame: Reality is only subjective in terms of our opinions and preferences.

Reframe: We can treat all of reality as subjective and get a good outcome, as if we authored it ourselves.

I've talked in this book and in my other books about affirmations. The specific technique I use involves visualizing what you want and repeating it or writing it down fifteen times a day. There is nothing magic in the details of how you do it. It doesn't matter how or when you do it or even how many times you repeat it. What matters is your intensity of focus on the desired outcome. I say that because in my experience the potential futures I could see most clearly for my own life seemed to be the futures that happened. I don't know if that is because of causation or coincidence, but I choose to treat it as real.

My point is that one can live inside a fully subjective reality without penalty. I'm either authoring my reality or imagining I am. Either way, fully awesome.

I prefer permissive affirmations that allow lots of ways to succeed. For example, I would focus on wealth instead of a specific promotion, and I would ask for a good romantic life as opposed to a specific partner. Give yourself more than one way to win.

If you want to influence yourself or others—and in so doing author your own reality—you need to know what buttons to push on the user interface of the human brain. If you think brains operate on an operating system of rational thought, you are both wrong and probably frustrated at a world that appears to make no sense. If you take the hypnotist's view that humans are irrational 90 percent of the time, you are ready to see the buttons on the user interface to reality.

And once you see the buttons, you control the game. (Or it can seem that way.) I'll take you through the main persuasion buttons you need to push to get what you want.

Freedom

Humans love freedom more than pleasure and more than escape from pain. We will even sacrifice our lives for the benefit of other people's freedom. If you want to understand why people do the things they do or you want to influence them, don't forget this often-neglected dimension of the human psyche. Humans will often take freedom over money, even over love.

Nearly every decision increases or decreases the freedom of people involved. You might not see that as a key variable, and that's my point. You *should* see it as a key variable because it tops most other concerns.

If you want to hire the best employees, make sure you emphasize how much freedom they will have. If you want the best marriage, make sure you offer freedom to each other, within reason. As I said in the Success Reframes chapter, if you want the best kind of job, pick one that gives you the most schedule flexibility.

Freedom is a huge button on the human interface, and it's so easy to push. Consider it in every decision you make and remember to consider it when trying to persuade others.

Fear

Fear is the strongest anti-motivator for humans. We will do nearly anything to escape it. That's why you should be on guard for manipulators who use fear to control you. And it's why you should use fear to persuade when it's ethical to do so. And by ethical, I mean you don't need to lie to describe something frightening that needs to be addressed. If you have reason to believe something bad is going to happen, I would argue you have an obligation to use rational fear to warn those in harm's way.

How powerful is the fear button when pressed? I believe it determines the selection of presidents in most American elections. Whoever pushes the fear message the hardest wins.

Novelty

The things that catch your attention and stick in your mind are the things that are different, weird, unexpected, or novel in some way. Novelty is the way good communicators grab your attention. They might, for example, curse in an inappropriate venue or include a slide in a slide deck that is wildly different from the rest. Or they might create an insulting nickname for a rival. That sort of thing.

Learn to insert novelty in your communications, and you can own any topic. But use it sparingly. Otherwise, it loses its power.

Repetition

Human rationality is so thin that repeating an obvious lie often enough will make the lie sound believable. That is the concept behind most advertising, politics, and propaganda. And it's the easiest button to push if you want to influence. Simply find a message, deliver it, and repeat. But also be aware that it's being used on you. Watch how often your decisions match what message you saw the most in advertisements or on the news. Once you understand how often repetition hijacks rational thought, you will see it everywhere.

Simplicity

Our brains are easily overwhelmed with details and complexity. When that happens, we don't know how to make smart decisions. If you wish to influence someone to action, keep your arguments simple and your asks even more so. Simplicity works. Every detail you add after the minimum detracts from your influence.

Fake Because (Reasons)

I already mentioned the power of the "fake because" in a few specific situations, but it works in almost any domain and is a big part of the user interface for reality. We humans like to have reasons for our decisions to not seem foolish to ourselves and others. But curiously, we are not picky about the quality of those reasons. You can see this most clearly in political issues. Voters tend to agree with their team first and rationalize that agreement later by imagining "reasons" or repeating reasons they heard in the news. The power of knowing this oddity of human intellect is that if you don't have a great reason for asking for something, use a bad reason. You can even use a reason that doesn't sound like a reason at all to the listener. Usually, people just want to know that you have a reason. They are less interested in what that reason is.

There will be exceptions, of course. People will want real reasons for their most important decisions, but most of life is a series of less-important decisions. And for those, any reason is often good enough.

Pacing and Leading

Pacing involves matching the person you want to persuade in any number of ways, from body language to breathing to clothing style to choice of words and more. If you match a person long enough, you form trust (that isn't otherwise earned), and you can eventually start to "lead" the person you want to influence. Be like the person you're imitating in some subtle ways until you can lead them. This is why leaders with "the common touch" do well. People see themselves in the leader, which triggers an automatic willingness to be led. It's like putting yourself in charge of yourself. That feels safe because you love yourself.

Aspirations

People obviously enjoy succeeding. They also love becoming better versions of themselves. If you can paint a credible picture of how someone can aspire to become more than they are, you can motivate them to act. Sometimes people's immediate aspirations are obvious, such as a team trying to win a championship. But perhaps the team is wondering what they should do and how they should act to realize that aspiration. That's where you come in. Tell people they're winners, they're good at comebacks, or some such message to create an aspirational target. They are not yet winners, but they could be soon!

A sporting competition is a special case. In life, we have broader aspirations for who we want to be. Most people are not aiming high, which gives them plenty of space to find a better version of themselves. People will work toward that better version somewhat reflexively if they can see it clearly and value it.

Aspirations are a great button for managing others, but it works just as well for motivating yourself. Who do you want to be? How do you want to be remembered? Years ago, I set my life's highest aspiration at having the largest funeral attendance as possible. In other words, I wanted to have so much positive impact on the planet that people would want to say goodbye to my rotting bones. That sounds like a vague aspiration, but it isn't. I can put almost any decision I make and any human interaction through that aspiration filter, and it tells me how to be.

Comparing

Comparing any two or more things is such a simple concept and so embedded in everything we do that one would think it requires no further explanation. But my observation is that 75 percent of the public tries to judge the value of a thing compared to some imaginary standard and not to real alternatives. And comparing to real alternatives is the only thing that is useful. We all need reminders to make sure we are comparing the right things. It helps to train yourself to always think in terms of contrast, especially when selling or communicating in general.

STUDIES SAY YOUR HAPPINESS DEPENDS ON HOW WELL YOUR LIFE COMPARES TO OTHERS.
SO INSTEAD OF GIVING YOU A RAISE, I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU PICTURES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ATTACKED BY BEARS.
DO YOU FEEL BETTER NOW?
DANG YOU TO HECK, THIS IS WORKING!
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4-6-12

For example, if you want to buy a house, your real estate agent will probably show you several terrible properties first. They do that to make the more expensive homes seem that much more desirable.

One way to understand the toxic effects of social media is that it changed how we see ourselves by comparing us to the top social media celebrities in the world instead of our sloppy friend Bob, to pick a random name. You might be a superstar compared to sloppy Bob, but how do you stack up against the most attractive and successful people in the world? That's who you are unintentionally competing with when you make social media a big part of your life. It's no surprise that social media is causing mental health problems, especially with young people.

Proper comparisons are important in negotiations, communications, strategy, humor, storytelling, financial analysis, and just about everything else that matters. You already know the importance of sensible comparisons, but keeping it at the front of your mind is likely to pay dividends.

And never compare yourself to imaginary perfections. That does nothing.

DILBERT **BY SCOTT ADAMS**

I AGREE MY PERFORMANCE THIS YEAR DID NOT MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS.
BUT YOU HAVE TO CONSIDER HOW MUCH WORSE IT COULD HAVE BEEN.
WHEN YOU COMPARE ME TO THE PEOPLE WHO TRIED HARD AND FAILED, I LOOK A LOT BETTER.
© 2022 SCOTT ADAMS, INC.
I'M NOT SAYING I DID BETTER THAN THE PEOPLE WHO TRIED HARD AND SUCCEEDED.
BUT THERE AREN'T MANY OF THEM.
I'M ONLY SAYING I'M BETTER THAN THE PEOPLE WHO TRIED AND FAILED.
NOT TRYING IS THE SECOND-BEST FINANCIAL OUTCOME. I SPENT ALMOST NOTHING.
I'M A TOP TEN PERCENT EMPLOYEE.
I HATE HOW MUCH SENSE THAT MAKES.
10-23-22

Pattern Recognition

The human brain is a pattern recognition machine but not a good one. It sees false patterns everywhere. And those false patterns inform our biases and bigotry. Once you understand brains as pattern recognition machines—as opposed to logic machines—everything starts to make sense. For example, now you know why people so often base their arguments on analogies instead of reason. It's because analogies are patterns. Whenever one thing reminds us of another, we irrationally conclude one of those things can describe or predict the other. We see this most vividly in the idea that "history repeats," which is closer to nonsense than insight. If history repeated, we'd all know what happens next, and obviously we don't.

And don't let a historian tell you the problem is that you didn't study history hard enough. Even historians can't predict the future.

Understanding the mind as a pattern recognition machine that isn't good at its job is one of the most useful buttons in the human interface for reality. Once you find that button, everything makes more sense.

For example, do you believe people choose their religions based on reason and data, or do they mostly adopt the religion they were raised in? An appeal to logic and reason won't answer that question. Understanding people as pattern-driven does.

Team Instinct

As a civilization, we waste immense energy debating people who are not open to being persuaded. They probably have the same problem when debating you. Once people join a team, they will hallucinate any argument they need to help that team "win."

Social media exacerbated the problem by gamifying team play. If you make a post that is popular with your followers, they reward you with reposts and likes. It's addicting and pulls us away from reason and compromise.

Once you see how powerful the team instinct is, you soon realize debate that appeals to reason and data is useless. You're in the wrong game. The other side is not trying to win the argument, they're trying to win *the game*. And winning the game often means making ridiculous arguments that make your team clap like seals no matter how absurd you are.

Association

Advertisers have long known that associating their product with something or someone beloved allows some of the goodwill to rub off on the product. What is less obvious is how often this guilt-by-association (on the dark side) or love-by-association (on the good side) matters to your everyday experience.

For example, if you meet a romantic interest and carelessly guide the conversation toward something tragic in the news, some of that tragedy will rub off on you and diminish your appeal even though you had nothing to do with it. So don't bring up ugly topics when making a first impression or at any other time during the getting-to-know-each-other phase. Later, an unpleasant topic will have less impact on your appeal—after the first impression period passes. But telling tragic stories still ruins the other person's day, so avoid doing that if you can.

When a producer pitches a movie to a studio, they often say what two successful movies could be combined to create this new film, as in, "It's like *ET* meets *Titanic*." If the studio executive liked both movies, some of that goodwill spills over.

You already knew corporations use the trick of associating things people like with their products and associating things people don't like with their competitors. I'm suggesting you adopt their methods in the way you communicate. Stick to communication that is funny, interesting, useful, optimistic, and even inspirational. It makes you far more fun to be around. The people who are not lucky enough to read this book will communicate the tragic stuff to other people for you, at their own social expense.

Visualization

Whoever controls “the picture” usually wins the day. And by that, I mean what mental image comes to mind when the topic is discussed. The more vivid, the more persuasive. For example, the field of climate change was forever changed by the famous hockey-stick graph that predicted a slow warming period followed by a rapid uptick. Other images for climate change focused on dying polar bears and hurricane coverage. When images that powerful enter the debate, you can usually predict which direction the public will go. And they have.

Similarly, what citizens think of illegal immigration is influenced mostly by what pictures they have been exposed to, including the kind of “pictures” we concoct in our imaginations.

The power of this “button” on the user interface of reality is that there are often many variables at play, which makes it hard to know where things are heading. But if you focus on what visual pops to mind when the topic comes up, you can usually predict better than chance.

Do you remember when candidate Donald Trump labeled candidate Jeb Bush “Low-energy Jeb”? The moment you heard that reframe, you got a mental image of Bush barely able to shuffle across the room. There was no competing visual because “normal Jeb” was the same guy.

Many things are persuasive. But visual persuasion wins against almost everything but fear.

Okay, now you know the main buttons on the User Interface for Reality. Drop your antiquated notions of a rational world that only needs a bit more knowledge to make us all hold hands and get along. Instead, reframe life as a dashboard of persuasion buttons you can push as needed to persuade others—and to train your own brain to author your reality.

CHAPTER 8

How to Make Your Own Reframes

Now that you've been exposed to the reframes in this book, you're ready to start making your own. You might want to do that to handle situations I didn't cover or to tweak my examples for your specific situation. These five rules will get you started:

1. Reframes don't need to be true or even logical.
2. Reframes only need to work.
3. You can quickly test reframes in your mind and body.
4. A reframe approaches a topic from a new perspective.
5. If the reframe creates an advantage, keep it.

A good way to brainstorm reframes is to imagine how the smartest and most aware people you know would approach a given situation. If you have a sense for how those people view the world, you can start seeing it through their eyes. For example, you can rely on some people to put a religious interpretation on events and others to cynically tell you to "follow the money." Assemble an imaginary advisory board of people you know and then imagine them giving you advice on the topic. The advice you imagine is likely to include some reframes and even more likely to spark your own creativity.

Once you have a reframe candidate to test, see if it's sticky. Does your mind automatically return to it? Do you find yourself repeating it in your mind or even aloud? If so, that's a good start. It doesn't mean the reframe will work, but it does tell you it's sticky enough to rewire your brain with repetition. Next, you test it. If it isn't effective, restart the brainstorming.

I've known for years how powerful reframes can be. I credit much of my success to their effectiveness. By now, you have experienced the power of some of the reframes in this book. You probably felt some of them as soon

as you read them while dismissing others as not applicable to you. And that's okay.

This is a good time to remind you that some reframes will feel right to you and others won't work with your unique brain and personality. My only caution is that you might not be good at knowing which ones will work for you because reframes are often non-intuitive—and sometimes goofy—by design.

If you are reading this sentence, you are probably already an improved version of the person who started reading this book. Your software has been updated. You are reborn, bristling with skills and freed from your past.

The final reframe is you.

CHAPTER 9

Just the Reframes

Introduction Reframes

Usual Frame: Taking the dog for a walk and failing.

Reframe: Taking the dog for a sniff and succeeding.

Usual Frame: I have nothing to do. I am just standing here.

Reframe: Perfect time to practice proper breathing and posture.

Usual Frame: I am waiting in line, which is a waste of time.

Reframe: I have time to breathe properly.

Usual Frame: Alcohol is a beverage.

Reframe: Alcohol is poison.

Success Reframes Usual Frame: My odds of success are low.

Reframe: Maybe I am bad at estimating the odds.

Usual Frame: I fail at 90 percent of the things I try.

Reframe: I only need to succeed 10 percent of the time.

Usual Frame: I want to do (something).

Reframe: I have decided to do (something).

Usual Frame: Manage your time.

Reframe: Manage your energy.

Usual Frame: Your job is what your boss tells you it is.

Reframe: Your job is to get a better job.

Usual Frame: I am bored with life.

Reframe: I am not embarrassing myself enough.

Usual Frame: Embarrassment is something to be avoided.

Reframe: Embarrassment is an investment.

Usual Frame: Being wrong is embarrassing and should be avoided.

Reframe: Fear of embarrassment forces you to be wrong.

Usual Frame: The effort is so big and daunting I can't even start.

Reframe: What's the smallest thing I can do that moves me in the right direction?

Usual Frame: Success requires setting goals.

Reframe: Systems are better than goals.

Usual Frame: Focus on being excellent at a skill that has commercial value.

Reframe: Acquire skills that ***work well together*** and make you rare and flexible at the same time.

Usual Frame: Another problem! Why me???

Reframe: Ooh, a new puzzle to solve.

Usual Frame: Ugh, I hate this repetitive chore.

Reframe: I can do this chore so gracefully and efficiently it feels like a game.

Usual Frame: Passion is the key to success.

Reframe: Passion is nice but not required.

Usual Frame: It takes money to make money.

Reframe: I can turn energy into money.

Usual Frame: Don't give something for nothing.

Reframe: Giving triggers reciprocity (on average).

Usual Frame: Do your job.

Reframe: Do more than your job.

Usual Frame: Success depends on who you know.

Reframe: Success depends on *how many* people you know.

Usual Frame: Your hard work will be rewarded.

Reframe: The illusion of hard work will be rewarded.

Usual Frame: Do what you are told.

Reframe: Do what you are NOT told but maybe someone should have.

Usual Frame: Learn what you need.

Reframe: Learn continuously, especially skills that work well together.

Usual Frame: A plan will either work or not **Reframe:** Friction and incentives always work. We just don't know how well until they are tested.

Usual Frame: Measure twice, cut once.

Reframe: Just start. See if you can figure it out as you go.

Usual Frame: School is boring but necessary.

Reframe: School is a competitive event. Game on.

Usual Frame: Compete against yourself and try to improve over time.

Reframe: Compete against others even if the others are unaware of the competition.

Usual frame: You did this wrong.

Reframe: Your other work is stronger.

Alternate: I think you can top that.

Alternate: I'm not sure it's possible to do this better, but let's find out.

Alternate: May I show you a shortcut/trick?

Alternate: Let me show you how some people do it.

Usual Frame: Tell people what they did wrong, so they avoid it next time.

Reframe: Tell people what they did well so they are motivated to continue improving.

Usual Frame: The universe is acting against me.

Reframe: The universe owes me.

Usual Frame: Luck is random and can't be managed.

Reframe: You can go where there is more luck (more energy).

Usual Frame: I am unusually unlucky this happened to me.

Reframe: Everyone has problems. No exceptions.

Usual Frame: Things should be fair. (me) **Reframe:** Life isn't fair. (Mom)

Usual Frame: Fairness is a desirable social goal.

Reframe: Fairness is the enemy of success.

Usual Frame: Avoid mistakes in your art.

Reframe: Invite mistakes into your art and keep the "good ones."

Usual Frame: I need to come up with a good idea.

Reframe: I need to release all my bad ideas as quickly as possible.

Usual Frame: You feel like a fraud. Everyone else is competent.

Reframe: You are learning fast. Look at all you learned!

Usual Frame: I feel like an impostor at my job.

Reframe: Everyone is an impostor.

Usual Frame: Your mood is determined by your internal thoughts.

Reframe: You can improve your mood by completing meaningful tasks.

Usual Frame: Whatever managers do is managing.

Reframe: If you are not measuring, you are not managing.

Usual Frame: Some art is good, and some is bad.

Reframe: If there is a market for the art, it is good art.

Usual Frame: Praise for your creation predicts you have a hit.

Reframe: Only action predicts a hit, not words. Watch for people to extend or modify your creation.

Usual Frame: I can't think of anything to write.

Reframe 1: I'm in the wrong environment for writing.

Usual Frame: I have writer's block.

Reframe 2: I'm trying to write at the wrong time of day.

Usual Frame: I can't think of anything good to write.

Reframe 3: I can write something bad and fix it.

Mental Health Reframes Usual Frame: I am my inner thoughts.

Reframe: I am what I do.

Usual Frame: Find yourself.

Reframe: Author yourself.

Usual Frame: Some people are good, and some are not.

Reframe: We're all flawed, and we're all good at different things.

Usual Frame: Art is entertainment.

Reframe: Art is a powerful, mind-altering drug.

Usual Frame: Your critics are evil monsters.

Reframe: Your critics are your mascots.

Usual Frame: Criticism feels like a dagger to your heart.

Reframe: Criticism is a chemical reaction in the skull of someone who isn't in the room.

Usual Frame: You should do what I think you should do.

Reframe: Go eat fudge. (Spoken only in your mind.) **Usual Frame:** Everyone is thinking about me.

Reframe: You are only a bit player in their movie.

Usual Frame: Social media is a form of entertainment.

Reframe: Social media is an addiction.

Usual Frame: An insult is damaging to my mental health.

Reframe: An insult is a *confession* that your accuser can't refute your opinion and/or has personal problems of some sort.

Usual Frame: An insult hurts because it means someone dislikes or disrespects you.

Reframe: A stranger's opinion of you—even if it gets published in *The New York Times*—is little more than their personal diary entry.

Usual Frame: Germs will harm me.

Reframe: Germs make me stronger.

Usual Frame: Coldness is pain and a signal I am in danger.

Reframe: Coldness makes me healthier and stronger.

Usual Frame: Death is a tragedy, and I need to feel bad about it.

Reframe: The deceased has no more problems. How did I make this about me?

Usual Frame: Death is a tragedy.

Reframe: It is an honor to help another pass.

Usual Frame: My feelings are the result of my situation.

Reframe: How I feel is my choice **Usual Frame:** I hate someone who deserves it.

Reframe: Hate is nothing but punishing myself for the misdeeds of others.

Usual Frame: Hate and anger are toxic feelings you hope will wear off.

Reframe: Hate and anger are a superpower level of energy you can use for gain.

Usual Frame: Why can't my problems go away?

Reframe: Everything has a right to exist, including this problem.

Usual Frame: Your ego is "you," and it must be protected.

Reframe: Your ego is your enemy.

Usual Frame: Avoid embarrassment.

Reframe: Invite embarrassment and use it as a club to kill your ego.

Usual Frame: I am a priceless work of art that must be protected.

Reframe: I am a potato that is easily replaced.

Usual Frame: I worry something will go wrong.

Reframe: I'm curious what will happen.

Usual Frame: Worry about all potential bad outcomes.

Reframe: Control the heck out of things you can control. Accept all outcomes.

Usual Frame: History is important.

Reframe: History doesn't exist.

Usual Frame: Reality is exactly what you see and feel.

Reframe: Imagine the objects around you as virtual objects.

Usual Frame: My stress and anxiety are caused by events in my life.

Reframe: I won't care about any of those events on my deathbed.

Usual Frame: I am in pain.

Reframe: I am in pain for a minute.

Usual Frame: You are the center of your universe and the highest priority.

Reframe: Viewed from space, everything looks small, including your problems **Usual Frame:** You need to stop thinking negative thoughts.

Reframe: You can't subtract negative thoughts. But you can crowd them out.

Usual Frame: I'm afraid to do the thing I know I should do.

Reframe: Life is short.

Usual Frame: I must do this pattern of behavior or else something bad will happen.

Reframe: I no longer need to do the behavior because less is more.

Usual Frame: Confidence is something you're born with.

Reframe: Confidence is something you learn.

Usual Frame: People have better social skills than I do.

Reframe: I am in the top 10 percent of people with good social skills (after reading this chapter).

Usual Frame: Each person at the gathering is a source of potential embarrassment for me.

Reframe: Each person has a problem (social awkwardness) that I can solve right now.

Usual Frame: No one wants to talk to me. I'm boring.

Reframe: Everyone enjoys talking to people who show interest in them.

Usual Frame: Be yourself and keep it real.

Reframe: Adjust your communication style for the situation.

Usual Frame: Is this a good decision?

Reframe: Can we test it small?

Usual Frame: People judge me, so I feel bad when I mess up.

Reframe: People only care about themselves. They don't care what dumb thing I did recently, even if they mention it.

Usual Frame: Stress comes with the job.

Reframe: Reducing stress IS your job.

Usual Frame: Why did I survive when others did not?

Reframe: It's no different from a clock reading 2:00 PM exactly once a day. It is just cause and effect. It has no meaning.

Usual Frame: Why did I survive when others did not?

Reframe: Every specific thing that has happened to me since birth is extraordinarily unlikely. This is more of that.

Usual Frame: Why me?

Reframe: God needs you here for something important.

Usual Frame: I feel a responsibility to hold this guilt.

Reframe: You have my permission to release your guilt.

Usual Frame: I feel bad that I was the lone survivor.

Reframe: What would the dead want you to do—suffer or be happy?

Usual Frame: You could have done more.

Reframe: Everyone can do more. It is a meaningless concept.

Usual Frame: Avoid addiction.

Reframe: Choose your addictions wisely.

Usual Frame: People with bad judgment often pursue dangerous and unproductive pleasures.

Reframe: People need a minimum level of pleasure to make life worth living, and if they can't get it safely, they will get it unsafely.

Usual Frame: Some people have no willpower. They are weak.

Reframe: Some people get more pleasure from certain vices than you do.

Usual Frame: There are good days and bad.

Reframe: All days are useful in different ways.

Usual Frame: Freedom is the ability to do what you want.

Reframe: Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.

Usual Frame: I can't handle this for the rest of my life.

Reframe: I can do anything for a day.

Usual Frame: I am a victim of my past traumas.

Reframe: History is imaginary.

Usual Frame: I am angry because something happened.

Reframe: I am living in the past.

and …

Usual Frame: I am anxious.

Reframe: I am living in the future (but not in a good way).

Usual Frame: You are the result of your traumas.

Reframe: You are a random bundle of loose wires.

Usual Frame: My trauma crippled me.

Reframe: My trauma is why I can kick your ass.

Usual Frame: Live in the now.

Reframe: Imagine even your smallest actions influencing your future.

Usual Frame: Safe things are safe. Dangerous things are dangerous.

Reframe: Safe-looking things can be dangerous. Dangerous-looking things can be safe.

Usual Frame: Happiness comes from within.

Reframe: Use the external world to program your brain for happiness.

Usual Frame: My mind is in my brain.

Reframe: My mind includes my brain, body, and physical environment. Any change to one changes the others.

Social Life Reframes Usual Frame: Be yourself.

Reframe: Become a better version of yourself.

Usual Frame: Learn to love yourself as you are.

Reframe: Be glad your brain is pestering you to improve.

Usual Frame: This person needs my advice.

Reframe: This person might need some information, empathy, or some help organizing their thoughts.

Usual Frame: People who complain want solutions.

Reframe: Some people who complain just enjoy complaining.

Usual Frame: This person has a strong personality. I must become stronger to deal with it as an equal.

Reframe: This person is toxic. I must escape now.

Usual Frame: Giving compliments is awkward, creepy, or manipulative.

Reframe: Withholding a compliment is almost immoral.

Usual Frame: No one seems to find me attractive.

Reframe: I haven't met enough people.

Usual Frame: I need to go find someone to be my romantic partner.

Reframe: I need to signal my genetic advantages to attract a romantic partner.

Usual Frame: I'm trying to make a dining decision with a crazy person. Please shoot me.

Reframe: It's not about food. It's about the illusion of control.

Usual Frame: I need a decision.

Reframe: I need a copilot to share the blame.

Usual Frame: The usual patterns hold (non-humor).

Reframe: The usual patterns are violated (humor).

Usual Frame: Marriage is about finding your soul mate.

Reframe: Marriage is about finding love with someone who values promises.

Usual Frame: Marriage is a great system, so if your marriage fails, that means one or both of you messed up.

Reframe: So many marriages ending in divorce proves that marriage is a poorly designed system.

Usual Frame: I want my relationship to last forever.

Reframe: Nothing lasts forever.

Usual Frame: This breakup ends my hopes for happiness.

Reframe: There are happier third marriages than first.

Usual Frame: I have lost my soulmate.

Reframe: I have a million soulmates I have not yet met.

Usual Frame: I am crying because my relationship ended.

Reframe: "Don't cry because it is over, smile because it happened."—Dr. Seuss **Usual Frame:** A teen can't understand the "reason" parents have given, and it turns into a power struggle.

Reframe: The parent is a guide for young brains that are not yet capable of understanding adult reasons.

Usual Frame: I'm talking to you, teen, and this is between us.

Reframe: I must answer to your future self, not your current self.

Usual Frame: People treat you poorly, and you can't do much about it.

Reframe: You cause people to act the way they do.

Usual Frame: The boss is in charge.

Reframe: The person with the best ideas is in charge.

Usual Frame: The experts are in charge.

Reframe: The best communicator is in charge.

Usual Frame: The boss is in charge.

Reframe: The most capable people are in charge.

Usual Frame: The people in charge have the power.

Reframe: Power = (Persuasion skill) x (Audience size) **Usual Frame:** I can discern people's motives by their actions.

Reframe: Mind-reading isn't real. Humans are terrible at discerning motives.

Usual Frame: Most people are normal, but I'm a basket case.

Reframe: Everyone is a basket case once you get to know them.

Usual Frame: Judge people by their mistakes.

Reframe: Judge people by how they respond to their mistakes.

Usual Frame: People who are always late are either incompetent or uncaring or both.

Reframe: Some people have time blindness.

Usual Frame: Small acts of kindness are good.

Reframe: There are no *small* acts of kindness.

Physical Health Reframes Usual Frame: When I am hungry, I eat food.

Reframe: Some food is fuel. Some food is entertainment.

Usual Frame: Overeating is a willpower problem.

Reframe: Overeating is a knowledge problem.

Usual Frame: I eat too much of the wrong food.

Reframe: I spend too much time with the wrong people.

Usual Frame: I want food, so I must be hungry.

Reframe: I want food, so I might be tired.

Usual Frame: I have a weight loss *goal*.

Reframe: I need to create a weight loss *system* for myself.

Usual Frame: Sugar is delicious but don't overdo it.

Reframe: Sugar is poison.

Usual Frame: I am tempted by bad carbs.

Reframe: I'm not the kind of person who eats bad carbs.

Usual Frame: My stomach has room for more food.

Reframe: I've had enough.

Usual Frame: I'm hungry, so I need food.

Reframe: I'm hungry, so I need protein.

Usual Frame: Exercising requires willpower and motivation.

Reframe: Exercising is easier than not exercising if you turn it into a habit.

Usual Frame: It's important to learn the best ways to exercise.

Reframe: The best exercises are the ones you are willing to do.

Usual Frame: I can't get to sleep.

Reframe: I didn't work hard enough.

Reality Reframes Usual Frame: Nuclear Power is risky.

Reframe: Nuclear power is green.

Usual Frame: People are rational 90 percent of the time.

Reframe: People are rational 10 percent of the time if that.

Usual Frame: One of us is right, and one is wrong.

Reframe: We are watching two different movies on one screen.

Usual Frame: You should spread your genes.

Reframe: No matter what you do, your genes will be diluted with each generation until your contribution nears zero.

Usual Frame: The best worldview is the ***true*** one.

Reframe: The best worldview is one that ***predicts*** the best **Usual Frame:** Predicting people's actions involves many variables.

Reframe: Follow the money. That's all you need.

Usual Frame: Life is about avoiding pain while pursuing happiness and meaning.

Reframe: Life is an adventure.

Usual Frame: Everyone is innocent until proven guilty.

Reframe: Citizens are innocent until proven guilty. Corporations and governments are presumed guilty until proven innocent.

Usual Frame: No cheating has been detected, so the organization is innocent.

Reframe: Whenever there is an opportunity for cheating and not getting caught, a lot to gain from cheating, and lots of people involved, cheating will always happen.

Usual Frame: People come up with their own opinions.

Reframe: People join teams, and the media assigns their opinions.

Usual Frame: Others think and feel approximately as I do.

Reframe: Others are unimaginably different.

The Operating System for Your Mind Usual Frame: You are the product of your experiences and genes.

Reframe: You are the author of your experience.

Usual Frame: I deserve to be treated well by others.

Reframe: You get what you give, on average. No one deserves anything.

Usual Frame: Reality is objective, and science helps us understand it.

Reframe: Our so-called reality is a simulation created by a higher intelligence.

Alternate: You are in a video game, and you have certain problems to solve to get to the next level.

Usual Frame: We have different memories.

Reframe: We created different subjective realities.

Usual Frame: Reality is objective.

Reframe: There might be an objective reality, but human brains don't have access to it.

Usual Frame: Reality is only subjective in terms of our opinions and preferences.

Reframe: We can treat all of reality as subjective and get a good outcome, as if we authored it ourselves.

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